NATION

ISRO hits milestone with reusable launch vehicle

BUSINESS

Markets rise for 3rd session; Sensex gains 190 pts

>> Page: 8 <<

SPORTS

Chennai beat RCB by 6 wickets

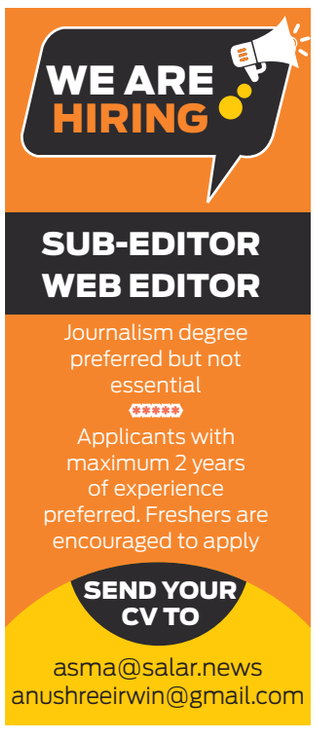
www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 23 MARCH 2024 | SATURDAY | BENGALURU | 13 RAMADAN, 1445 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 66 | Pages: 8



Kejri 'kingpin' of liquor scam: ED

Delhi CM says life dedicated to nation as court sends him to jail till 28 March

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

On Friday Delhi Court sent Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to ED custody till 28 March. The probe agency had asked for 10 days remand after arresting him in excise policy case.

Kejriwal who was produced before the court on Friday continued to maintain his stand. While entering the court complex, Kejriwal told reporters, "My life is dedicated to the country whether I am inside or outside the prison."

ED alleged that Kejriwal is the key conspirator and kingpin in demanding kickbacks from businessmen. The agency further claimed that Kejriwal was directly involved in the formation of the Excise policy.

The ED counsel claimed that Vijay Nair, who was the media in charge of AAP, was working for Kejriwal. Nair, who the agency said lives adjacent to the residence of Kejriwal, acted as a middleman between the AAP and the South group.

ED counsel further claimed that the proceeds of crime are not only Rs 100 crore but profits made by bribe givers were also proceeds of crime. The counsel said that the agency had traced Hawala trails of Rs 45 crore that the agency says was used in the Goa Election.

Senior Advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi appearing for Kejriwal opposed the remand plea and submitted that the agency needs to show the necessity to arrest. Singhvi argued that the power of arrest and the necessity of arrest are two different things.

Singhvi said that in the history of 75 years of independence, this is the first time a sitting chief minister is arrested.

Arvind Kejriwal was produced in the court on Friday a day after he was arrested from his residence in Delhi liquor scam case *PHOTO: PTI*

Kejriwal withdraws from SC plea against arrest

Kejriwal on Friday withdrew from Supreme Court his plea against arrest by ED.

Kejriwal's counsel said he would contest the remand proceedings before the trial court and then come back to the apex court with another petition.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, representing Kejriwal, mentioned the matter before a bench headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna and said since the remand proceedings before the trial court later in the day will be clashing with the hearing in the top court, he be allowed to withdraw the plea. The move came hours after Justice Khanna had told Singhvi that Kejriwal's petition against his arrest would be heard by a three-judge bench during the day.

AAP worried about Kejriwal's security in ED custody:

Delhi Cabinet Minister Atishi on Friday said AAP is worried about the security of Kejriwal in ED custody. "Being the chief minister of Delhi, Kejriwal has Z+ security cover. Now he is in ED custody. Who will be responsible for Kejriwal's safety? Who is entering his lock-up in the ED office? The Centre has to answer about his security arrangements there," she said.

AAP allege his family 'placed under house arrest'

AAP MLAs and councillors reached Kejriwal's residence in Civil Lines to meet his family on FridayAAP MLA Durgesh Pathak said, "We have come here to meet his family. They are not being allowed to meet anyone. They have been placed under house arrest. Nobody knows what state they are in." —*PTI*

Bharadwaj, Atishi detained as AAP protests

New Delhi, 22 March

Delhi Cabinet ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj were detained here on Friday as AAP leaders staged a protest against BJP over the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by Enforcement Directorate in the excise policy case. The two ministers and others were taken away in police buses after they refused to disperse from Central Delhi's ITO intersection, which is near the headquarters of the AAP and the BJP and where prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure were in force. —*PTI*

K Kavitha *PHOTO: PTI*

SC REFUSES BAIL TO K KAVITHA IN EXCISE SCAM

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Supreme Court on Friday refused to grant bail to BRS leader K Kavitha, who has been arrested by Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi excise policy scam case. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi asked Kavitha to approach the trial court, saying it is a practice that this court is following and cannot bypass the protocol.

The bench said as far as Kavitha's plea challenging the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is concerned, the court is issuing notice to the ED and seeking its response in six weeks. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Kavitha told the bench that he had one request to the court that he should not be asked to go to the high court.

—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

SC rejects Muslim petition over ASI survey of Bhojshala

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Supreme Court on Friday refused to interfere with a Madhya Pradesh High Court order directing the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to survey Bhojshala, a protected 11th-century monument, while posting the matter for hearing on 1 April. Lawyer Shirish Dube, representing the Hindu Front for Justice, told reporters that since the apex court refused to hear the matter on Friday, the survey will continue as directed by the High Court. Responding to the absence of authorised Muslim representatives during the survey, 'Shahar Qazi' Waqar Sadiq raised concerns over the ASI's notification process. Sadiq said ASI reports of 1902 and 1903 are in its records and the first report on the site mentioned that "this is a mosque". —*PTI*

Woman dies after being struck in hanging dish cable

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

A 36-year-old woman lost her life after being struck by a hanging TV dish cable while riding a pillion on a bike with her husband on Friday. The victim, identified as Lakshmibhai Jadav, hailed from Chunchanakatte village in Badami taluk, Bagalkot district. Officials from Bengaluru Electricity Supply Company Limited clarified that the unfortunate incident did not occur due to any negligence on their part, as there was no electricity flowing through the cable. —*Salar News*

Modi bestowed Bhutan's highest civilian award

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday received Bhutan highest civilian award, the Order of t¬he Druk Gyalpo,' making him the first foreign Head of the Government to receive the honour.

The award recognizes Modi's contribution to strengthening the India- Bhutan friendship and his people-centric leadership.

King announced the conferment of the award during Bhutan 114th National Day celebrations held at the Tashichhodzong, Thimphu on 17 December, 2021. On Friday, Prime Minister Modi received it during his two-day State visit, his third since he took over as the prime minister in 2014. Modi's visit seeks to further cement India's unique and enduring relations with Bhutan as part of the country's Neighbourhood First' Policy.

India and Bhutan on Friday exchanged several MoU and signed agreements in the fields of energy, trade, digital connectivity, space and agriculture, and finalised the MoU on the establishment of rail links between the two nations.

Narendra Modi *PHOTO: PTI*

The MoU was exchanged in the presence of Modi and his Bhutanese counterpart Tshering Tobgay during the ongoing two-day State visit of Modi.

The two leaders held discussions on various aspects of the multi-faceted bilateral relations and "forged an understanding to further enhance cooperation in sectors such as renewable energy, agriculture, youth exchange, environment and forestry, and tourism," it said.

Modi also announced that New Delhi will provide support of Rs 10,000 crore to Thimphu over next five years.

Modi in his nearly 25-minute address said India is the fastest growing, fifth largest economy in the world and "we have laid down a roadmap for its Amrit Kaal". —*PTI*

RUSSIA, CHINA VETO US' GAZA CEASEFIRE PACT

UNITED NATIONS, 22 MARCH

Russia and China on Friday vetoed a US-sponsored UN resolution calling for "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza to protect civilians and enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to more than 2 million hungry Palestinians.

The vote in the 15-member Security Council was 11 members in favour, three against and one abstention.

Before the vote, Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said Moscow supports an immediate cease-fire, but he questioned the language in the resolution and accused US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield of "misleading the international community" for "politicized" reasons.

Earlier, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said she was optimistic that the new, tougher draft resolution would be approved Friday by the 15-member council. The Security Council had already adopted two resolutions on the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, but none calling for a cease-fire. Russia and China vetoed a US-sponsored resolution in late October calling for pauses in the fighting to deliver aid and a halt to arming Hamas. —*PTI*

BEAUTY OF MYSURU

Thousands of devotees participate in the Panchamaha Rathotsava in Mysuru, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

UP Madrasa Act unconstitutional: HC

LUCKNOW, 22 MARCH

The Allahabad High Court Friday declared the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education Act, 2004, "unconstitutional" and violative of the principle of secularism, and asked the state government to accommodate current students in the formal schooling system.

A division bench comprising Justice Vivek Chaudhary and Justice Subhash Vidyarthi of the Lucknow bench of the court declared the law ultra vires on a writ petition filed by a person named Anshuman Singh Rathore.

In his reaction to the order, UP Madrasa Education Board Chairman Iftikhar Ahmed Javed said the board will study the decision and decide the further course of action.

"Now after 20 years, the Madrasa Education Act has been declared unconstitutional. Obviously there has been some mistake somewhere. Our lawyers could not present their case properly before the court," he said.

Senior All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) member Maulana Khalid Rashid Farangi Mahali said the order should be challenged in the Supreme Court. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF SUMMER

Water storage in reservoirs at just 38%

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Ahead of the summer season, the live storage capacity in India's 150 primary reservoirs stands at just 38 per cent of their total capacity, which is less than the last decade's average for the same period, according to data.

Karnataka, among other states, registered lower storage levels compared to the same period last year, according to the weekly bulletin by the Central Water Commission.

Bengaluru hosts 14,000 borewells with 6,900 of them having dried up. Water bodies have either been encroached upon or have dried up. The city requires 2,600 MLD of water, out of which 1,470 MLD is sourced from the Cauvery River and 650 MLD from borewells, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had told reporters.

Last year the live storage available was 80.557 BCM, with an average of 72.396 BCM over the past decade *PHOTO: PTI*

Several other states, including Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (two combined projects in both states), and Tamil Nadu, also reported lower storage levels compared to last year.

The total live storage capacity of these 150 reservoirs is 178.784 BCM, which accounts for about 69.35 per cent of the nation's total live storage capacity estimated at 257.812 billion cubic metres, according to official data.

—*PTI*

Mercury may soar to 40°C on Holi: Study

The probability of temperatures soaring to 40 degrees Celsius around the festival of Holi late March has multiplied due to climate change, according to an analysis of temperature data since 1970. Researchers conducted the analysis to place India within the context of global warming trends Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Bihar had a more than 5 per cent chance of experiencing such temperatures, they said. —*PTI*

HC greenlights board exam for classes 5, 8, 9, 7 & 11

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

High Court on Friday granted permission to the State Government to proceed with the conduct of board exams for classes 5,8, 9 and 11 for the academic year 2023-24, overturning the March six order of a single judge bench. The decision of the division bench comprising Justice K Somashekar and Justice Rajesh Rai K, came after the State Government filed an appeal challenging the earlier ruling.

The single judge's verdict had nullified the State Government's decision, made in October 2023, to hold board exams for these classes through the Karnataka State Examination and Assessment Board (KSEAB).

The judge had argued that the scheme for conducting these exams lacked the necessary framework provided by Sections 22 and 145 of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983, which mandate the formulation of rules for implementing the examination system and require input from stakeholders before finalising such rules.

The court's decision now allows the government to continue and complete the halted exams for classes 5, 8, and 9 and also finish evaluating the exams conducted for class 11.

The exams for classes 5, 8, and 9 were stopped midway following a judgment by the apex court, creating uncertainty among students and educational institutions.

The bench also directed the government to engage in consultations with stakeholders before issuing a formal notification for conducting board exams for the next academic year. This emphasis on stakeholder input aligns with the principles of inclusive decision-making and ensures that the concerns and perspectives of all relevant parties are taken into account. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

HC denies plea of Nettaru's accused for jail transfer

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

High Court has rejected a petition filed by the accused in the Praveen Nettaru murder case seeking transfer to Parappana Agrahara prison in City citing a safety threat. Accused Abdul Basheer and others had filed a writ petition fearing an attack and difficulties in meeting family and lawyers. However, High Court upheld the decision to keep them in their current jails.The counsel for the accused petitioners stated that after they were transferred to Belagavi jail in 2023, two of them had been attacked in prison. The court also directed to provide proper videoconferencing facilities at the respective prisons to facilitate communication between prisoners and defence counsel, along with headphones to ensure privacy. *—Salar News*

HC stays probe against Shobha over blast remarks

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

High Court on Friday stayed further investigation in a criminal case filed against BJP MP and Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje over her statement during a protest in Bengaluru, where she linked a suspect in the Rameshwaram cafe blast here with Tamil Nadu. Justice Krishna S Dixit, presiding over a single judge bench, issued notice to the concerned parties and paused the ongoing investigation. The judge advised Karandlaje to exercise caution in her public statements, emphasising that leaders from all parties should show restraint to maintain a civilised society. "People who come from Tamil Nadu plant bombs here, those from Delhi chant 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogans and some who come from Kerala are involved in 'acid attacks'," she had claimed. *—PTI*

BJP: Ban Shivarajkumar's movies, ads

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

BJP on Friday requested the Election Commission (EC) to prohibit display of films, advertisements, and billboards of actor Shivarajkumar who it claimed is campaigning for Congress in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls. His wife, Geetha Shivarajkumar is a candidate from Congress in the Shivamogga Lok Sabha constituenc. Karnataka State President of BJP leader R Raghu stated that Shivarajkumar, being a prominent figure in the state and currently engaged in a "statewide election campaign for Congress" , holds significant influence over the populace through his cinematic work and "public persona." "While we respect his right to participate in the democratic process, it is imperative to maintain a level playing field and prevent undue advantage or influence during the election period," Raghu said. *—PTI*

BWSSB takes over borewells at work sites

The body will instead provide treated water for construction sites over 20K sqft

BWSSB held a meeting with 338 major builders and assured them that the board would provide 1,300 MLD water daily for their needs **PHOTO: PTI**

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has issued an order to take over borewells at construction sites. They will instead provide treated water for the construction works.

BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar said: "Now it is important to regulate the use of treated water for construction purposes, especially for buildings exceeding 20,000 square feet."

BWSSB held a meeting with 338 major builders and assured them that the board would provide 1,300 MLD water daily for their needs.

BWSSB has decided to cut water supply to bulk customers by 20 per cent from 15 March. The city's has around 3 lakh bulk consumers.

However, the BWSSB has passed the instructions to the institutions with more water connections, such as railways, HAL, Air Force, Defence, CRPF, Biocon, Nimhans, Victoria Hospital, and others, to raise awareness about water conservation on their premises.

Earlier the study conducted by IISc highlighted alarming trends in Bengaluru's urbanisation, with a sharp increase in built-up areas by 1055 per cent over the last few decades. However, what has gone unnoticed is the significant decrease in water spread area by 79 per cent and vegetation by 88 per cent over the same period, which led to the severe water crisis in the City. Currently, BWSSB has undertaken the initiative to fill 14 dried-up lakes with treated water.

—Salar News

Concerns over illegal borewell ops

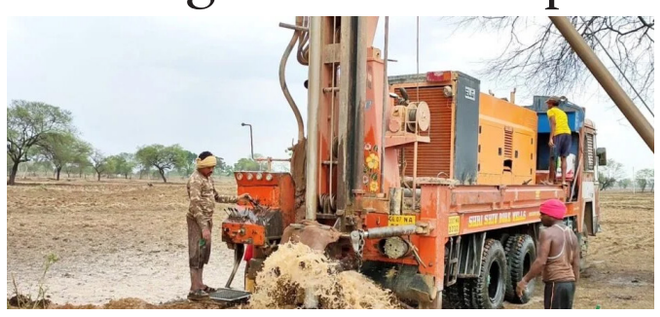
BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

The residents of SMR Layout in Kalkere, Horamavu, have raised concerns about illegal borewell operations in their area. Despite having a borewell within a 5km radius, residents are forced to rely on water tankers, which charge exorbitant rates of Rs 2,000 for 2,000 litres of water.

Residents allege an illegal borewell was dug in the area around 10 days ago, and since then the 20 to 30 tankers have visited daily to extract water. This excessive extraction is causing worry among residents, as it may lead to a depletion of groundwater levels, posing a threat to their water supply.

Additionally, residents complain that the water tankers are exploiting the situation by charging high prices for the water.Ramesh (name changed), a resident of SMR Layout, mentioned that despite their concerns, the owner of the borewell claims to have permission from authorities for commercial use. However, residents dispute this claim, asserting that the owner only has permission for electricity generation, not water extraction.

Speaking to **Salar News**, BWSSB officials said they have advised residents to file FIRs against the owner, and noted that the board has not granted permission for borewells.



Horamavu residents complain that the water tankers are exploiting the situation by charging high prices for the water **PHOTO: PTI**

- BWSSB officials said they have advised residents to file FIRs against the owner, and noted that the board has not granted permission for borewells

Another resident, Karthik, expressed frustration over the lack of response from authorities despite multiple complaints made to the helpline (1916).

The residents of Horamavu, Kalkere, and Ramamurthy Nagar have been grappling with water scarcity issues since January. Faced with a worsening situation, residents from 30 layouts in these areas approached Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to seek urgent intervention. Their primary demand is the immediate installation of an underground pipeline to alleviate the water crisis.They pointed out that the region comprises 11 villages housing approximately 48,000 residential buildings, including single-family homes, multi-dwelling units, and apartment complexes. They flagged that the water table has depleted, with nearly 80 per cent of public borewells running dry. Even new borewells, dug to depths of up to 1,500 feet are failing to yield water.

Ramesh highlighted that this incident marks the second instance of a borewell being exploited for commercial purposes in the area. Earlier this month, another borewell was utilised commercially. *—Salar News*

BWSSB LAUNCHES 'GREEN STAR CHALLENGE'

BENGALURU, 22 MAR

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) on Friday launched an innovative programme called the 'Green Star Challenge' for hotels and restaurants across the City to conserve water, on the occasion of World Water Day.

"We are promoting panchasutras (five principles and actions) to promote water self-sufficiency," Chairman of BWSSB V. Ram Prasath Manohar, said.

"The first action is to save the water and use water efficiency technology and devices. The second principle is to use eco-friendly treated water for non-drinking purposes. The third principle is to maximise the recharge of underground water by putting lots of rainwater recharge structures," he said.

On the fourth strategy, he said the aim is to promote the conservation of bore wells by deploying innovative technologies like Artificial Intelligence, IoT and robotics. The fifth important strategy is to promote communication of these initiatives to all the stakeholders of the community. *—Salar News*

LOK SABHA POLLS

AICC Secretary and Congress leader Mansoor Ali Khan taking blessings from Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji, pontiff of the Adi Chunchungiri Mutt, Ameer e Shariat Maulana Sageer Ahmed Khan Rashadi and Moulana Mohamed Maqsood Imran Rashadi, after his candidature was announced for the Lok Sabha elections for Bengaluru Central. He was accompanied by former union minister K Rahman Khan, B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan and other senior Congress leaders **PHOTO: SALAR**

State AAP observes 'Black Day' over Kejriwal's arrest

Karnataka AAP unit stages a protest in the City condemning the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

Karnataka unit of AAP on Friday staged a protest in the City condemning the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister and party leader Arvind Kejriwal.

Kejriwal was on Thursday night arrested by Enforcement Directorate in an excise policy-linked money laundering case.

The arrest, the first of a serving Chief Minister, came hours after Delhi High Court refused to grant protection to the AAP national convener from any coercive action by the central probe agency.

Led by AAP state unit president H N Chandrashekar, popularly known as 'Mukhyamantri Chandru', the party workers observed 'Black Day' at the Freedom Park.

Speaking on the occasion, Chandrashekar alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi got Kejriwal arrested as he could not 'digest his growing popularity across the country.'

"What else can be expected from those who say they will change the Constitution itself? The central government has planned to punish those who are against the BJP by using organisations like the Income Tax Department and Enforcement Directorate," he alleged. *—Salar News*

'Kejri's arrest shows this is a dictatorial govt'

Bengaluru, 22 March

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah slammed the Centre on Friday over the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in connection with the alleged liquor policy scam. Siddaramaiah alleged that the arrest shows this is a 'dictatorial government', adding that the move intends to 'threaten'. "The arrest of Kejriwal is only to threaten. There was no evidence to arrest him. I don't know why they have arrested him. It is undemocratic and it shows that this is a dictatorial government," Siddaramaiah said on Friday. *—ANI*

HATE SPEECH

Court issues interim stay on Tejasvi Surya case

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

Karnataka High Courton Friday has issued an interim stay on the case against BJP MP Tejasvi Surya over an alleged hate post on social media. The post is related to a protest concerning the assault on a youth named Mukesh in Nagarathpet.

Surya was booked for the post on Thursday. Election Commission officials confirmed that an FIR had been registered against Surya.

This action follows a complaint filed by officials of the Election Commission and the

PHOTO: PTI

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike. It was alleged that Surya, who is also the President of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, had targeted a minority community in a post, inciting enmity between different communities. *—Salar News*

BJP has no faith in Constitution, says CM

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah launched a scathing attack on the BJP-led NDA government, accusing of freezing Congress' bank accounts out of fear of defeat in the coming Lok Sabha polls. Speaking at a press conference at the KPCC office on Friday, Siddaramaiah said, "I hope that the people of India would reject the saffron party and safeguard the nation's democratic values."

He alleged that BJP demonstrated a lack of faith in democracy and the Constitution, opting for a dictatorial approach.

He demanded that free and fair elections be conducted. Expressing outrage over the freezing of Congress' bank accounts, Siddaramaiah criticised it as a dictatorial act aimed at hindering the party's participation in the elections. Siddaramiah further accused BJP of promoting inequality, strengthening the caste system, and neglecting crucial issues such as unemployment and farmers' problems.

—Salar News

LOK SABHA POLLS: ₹7.86CR CASH SEIZED IN STATE

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

Election Commission seized Rs 7.86 crore in cash and liquor valued at Rs 1,000 crore in Bengaluru Rural district on Friday.

The officials seized 1,48,985 litters of liquor stored without proper documents. Additionally, 45 cases were registered for lack of proper documentation under the excise department. Nine vehicles including lorries and cars were seized. Furthermore, 10 kg of ganja was confiscated during the operation.

In Belagavi, they seized Rs 1.50 lakh in cash from an individual at the airport. Jasvir Singh was apprehended while attempting to carry Rs 2 lakh to Delhi from B elagavi, exceeding the permitted limit. The authorities seized Rs 1.5 lakh of the excess amount.

In Ramanagara district, Rs 5.3 crore was seized from the Kanaminake toll plaza without proper documentation.

In Hubballi, 480 mixers worth Rs 8 lakh from the railway station was seized. Meanwhile, in Dharwad, police intercepted Prakash Kumar travelling from Kolhapur to Sindhanur on a KSRTC bus. At Thegur check post, 778g of gold ornaments worth Rs 38.5 lakh were seized due to discrepancies between the bill and the ornaments.

A case was registered at the Garaga police station in connection with the incident. *—Salar News*

ON ED RAIDS

Plaint filed against Priyank for post on PM

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

BJP leader Chalavadi Narayanaswamy on Friday filed a complaint with Election Commission on Friday against Minister Priyank Kharge for his social media post alleging that Congress leader has used derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

In a post on X, Kharge questioned the timing of the action taken by central agencies and said, "The IT/ED raids and arrests of Opposition leaders are nothing but BJP's standard operating procedures to distract the public from real issues. What were the enforcement agencies doing for so long, awaiting orders from Chor Guru and Chandal Shishya?"

Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, Priyank Kharge **PHOTO: PTI**

Narayanaswamy said that the words "Chandal Shishya" are unconstitutional.

"You cannot abuse Modi in such a manner. Such terms come under the SC/ST Act. We have filed a complaint with the Election Commission," Narayanaswamy told ANI.

Meanwhile, BJP Yuva Morcha workers held a protest near the residence of Priyank in Sadashivanagar. Later, police arrived at the spot and detained workers.

Earlier, the Delhi Chief Minister was arrested on Thursday night after skipping nine summons issued against him by the Enforcement Directorate and Delhi High Court, which refused to grant him relief from any coercive action by the probe agency.

The case pertains to alleged irregularities and money laundering in framing and implementing the Delhi excise policy case 2022, which was later scrapped.

—Salar News with Agencies

Metro extends timings on IPL match days

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has announced changes to Metro timings.

For cricket fans attending IPL matches at Chinnaswamy Stadium, the last metro train will depart at 11.30pm instead of the usual time on match days — 25 March (Holi), 29 March and 2 April.

BMRCL also announced that paper tickets will be issued on these days for

PHOTO: PTI

those who board and deboard at MG Road and Cubbon Park metro stations, from where the Chinnaswamy stadium can be accessed. They are priced at Rs. 50. These tickets will be available for purchase at all Metro stations from 2 pm onwards on match days. However, they are valid only for a single journey to any other Metro station from Cubbon Park and MG Road stations after 8 pm on the day of issue.

In addition to the IPL matches, the BMRCL will also start Metro services earlier for Bidadi Half Marathon scheduled on Sunday. *—Salar News*

Former Odisha minister Damodar Rout passes away

Bhubaneshwar, 22 MARCH

Former Odisha minister and seven time-MLA Damodar Rout passed away at a private hospital in Bhubaneshwar on Friday morning.His mortal remains will be taken to his government residence at Unit-6 in Bhubaneswar where his well-wishers will pay their last respects to the leader, as per sources. Several leaders expressed their grief over the demise of the veteran Biju Janata Dal leader. Following his death, Rout's son and BJD MLA Sambit Routray said, "I thought his health was improving but he left us all this morning. We will now take his body to his home, then to the party office and later to his constituency at Kujang, Paradip and if time permits, we will take him to Ersama as well." Rout held the position of MLA for seven consecutive terms, representing both Erasma (five times) and Paradip (twice) Assembly constituencies. -ANI

Stalin launches LS poll campaign from Trichy

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI, 22 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin will DMK's party's campaign for the 19 April Lok Sabha polls, from this central district on Friday. Stalin, a key leader of the Opposition INDIA bloc, will canvass votes for the party-led bloc's Tiruchirappalli candidate, MDMK leader Durai Vaiko and the DMK's Arun Nehru in nearby Perambalur. DMK leads the multi-party Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA). It had won 38 of the 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu then, besides the neighbouring Puducherry segment. Durai is the son of MDMK founder Vaiko and the Tiruchirappalli constituency has been allotted to the party by the DMK as part of the poll pact. -PTI

'Firm gave BJP Rs 25cr after director's arrest'

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Senior AAP leader and Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Friday claimed that a pharmacy firm paid Rs 25 crore to BJP through electoral bonds after its director was arrested in the excise policy case. Addressing a press conference, Bharadwaj also said that there was a threat to the life of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the excise policy-linked money laundering case on Thursday night. A Hyderabad-based Pharma company whose director was arrested by ED in the excise policy case paid Rs 25 crore in electoral bonds to the BJP in November 2022, he alleged. The minister said there was no evidence of any money trail or proceeds of crimes against AAP and Kejriwal as was being charged. Bharadwaj said how Kejriwal was arrested is "inhuman". -PTI

ED searches residence of Bengal minister

KOLKATA, 22 MARCH

A team from Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted searches at the residence of West Bengal minister Chandranath Sinha in Bolpur in Birbhum district on Friday in connection with its investigation into the alleged school recruitment scam, officials said.Accompanied by a huge contingent of central forces, ED team reached Sinha's residence around 9.15am and began the search, they said. Sinha, who holds MSME and Textiles portfolios in the Mamata Banerjee government, was not in his residence at that time. He was at his ancestral house in Murarai, around 90km away. "The search is in connection with the investigation of the alleged irregularities in the school recruitment scam. The minister is not present at his residence, we are talking to his family," an officer said. Sinha was earlier summoned by CBI in the cattle and coal smuggling cases. -PTI

Police stop AAP leaders and workers who were staging a protest against the arrest of their leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in Guwahati on Friday. AAP workers block a road during a protest at ITO, in New Delhi. Vehicles stuck in a traffic jam at the ITO bridge in Delhi due to the protest by AAP. ***PHOTOS: PTI***

Opposition condemns Kejriwal's arrest

Ruling dispensation is displaying a remarkable degree of nervousness, says NC prez Omar Abdullah

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Opposition leaders across political parties have strongly condemned the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Kejriwal, leader of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), was arrested on Thursday in connection with corruption allegations relating to the city's policies over alcohol sales. Kejriwal has denied any wrongdoing.

Opposition leaders have alleged that his arrest is politically motivated.

But Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling BJP has denied the allegation and said that it is merely acting against corruption.

Alluding to Modi, Rahul Gandhi of the main Opposition Congress party wrote on X, formerly twitter, on Thursday evening.

"Aisi Taisi Democracy. For all the talk of 400+ seats, the ruling dispensation is displaying a remarkable degree of nervousness.

Having a sitting Opposition CM arrested by a pliable central agency within days of the general elections being announced is a blot on democracy," National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah said in a post on X.

Sharad Pawar, leader of the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) said that Kejriwal's arrest showcases the "depth to which BJP will stop for power".

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said Kejriwal's arrest would "give birth to a new people's revolution".

Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister of Kerala, said Kejriwal's arrest was "outright vicious and part of a callous plot to silence all opposition voices just ahead of the general elections".

His counterpart in Tamil Nadu, MK Stalin, said: "Not a single BJP leader faces scrutiny or arrest, laying bare their abuse of power and the decay of democracy. The relentless persecution of opposition leaders by the BJP government smacks of a desperate witch-hunt." —*BBC*

Arvind Kejriwal ***PHOTO: PTI***

> **Not a single BJP leader faces scrutiny or arrest, laying bare their abuse of power and the decay of democracy**
>
> MK Stalin, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister

The corrupt will go to jail, says BJP

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

BJP on Friday lashed out at the Aam Aadmi Party for its assertion that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will run the government from jail, saying it is an insult to people, law and democracy.

Union minister Anurag Thakur asked if Kejriwal considers himself above law while BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra accused AAP leaders of peddling lies on the issue and asserted that those involved in corruption will go to jail.

Several BJP leaders recalled exposed now.

Thakur said he ignored nine summons from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and refused to join the probe.

"Does he think he is above law," the Union minister asked. His decision to continue as chief minister is an insult to the people of Delhi, law and democracy, Thakur added.

BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said Kejriwal's decision to continue as chief minister despite being arrested makes him the first such chief minister.

—*PTI*

Anurag Thakur ***PHOTO: PTI***

Kejriwal's claim of probity and past allegations of corruption against politicians, including Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Sharad Pawar among others, while seeking their arrest, as they claimed that he has been

Kejriwal got arrested due to his deeds: Anna Hazare

MUMBAI, 22 MARCH

Renowned social activist Anna Hazare on Friday said Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was arrested because of "his deeds" and added that he had cautioned the AAP leader against getting involved in excise policy matters. "He got arrested due to his deeds. Had he not done anything, there was no question of his being arrested," Hazare said from his village Ralegan Siddhi in western Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district. "Our job is not to make an excise policy," the anti-corruption crusader said and emphasised "Even a small child knows that liquor is bad. I had asked him to stay away from this (excise policy) issue. But he went ahead and made the policy," he added. Expressing disappointment, he noted, "I felt sad that a person like Kejriwal, who once worked with me and raised our voice against alcohol, is now making the excise policy." —*PTI*

Anna Hazare ***PHOTO: PTI***

'NO BAR IN LAW ON KEJRIWAL FROM CONTINUING AS CM'

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Arvind Kejriwal can continue as Delhi Chief Minister post his arrest by Enforcement Directorate in an excise policy-linked money laundering case with legal experts on Friday saying there is no bar under the law that prohibits an arrested person from holding the post.

While senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan said there is no bar in law on a person continuing as chief minister once arrested, senior advocate Vikas Singh said though legally there is no bar, administratively it will be next to impossible.

"As per the Representation of the People Act, it is only after a conviction that an MLA can be treated as disqualified and therefore disentitled to be a minister. Although unprecedented, it is technically possible for him to function from jail," he added.

The lawmaker shall continue to be disqualified for a further period of six years after his release. Under Article 361 of the Constitution only the President and Governor are granted immunity from arrest and proceedings before a court. —*PTI*

BJP releases 4th list for LS polls

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

BJP on Friday released its fourth list of 15 candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The list includes the Parliamentary constituencies of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. In Tamil Nadu, Pon V Balaganapathy will contest from Tiruvallur, RC Paul Kanagaraj from Chennai (North), A Ashwathaman from Tiruvannamalai, KP Ramalingam from Namakkal and AP Muruganandam from Tiruppur.

The party has decided to field K Vasantharajan from Pollachi, VV Senthilnathan from Karur, P Karthiyayini from Chidambaram (SC), SGM Ramesh from Nagapattinam, M Muruganandam from Thanjavur, Devanathan Yadav from Sivaganga, Raama Sreenivasan from Madurai, Raadhika Sarathkumar from Virudhunagar and B John Pandian from Tenkasi (SC).

A Namassivayam will contest the lone seat in the Union Territory of Puducherry for the elections.

The list was released by the National General Secretary, Arun Singh.

Meanwhile, BJP on Thursday released a list of nine Lok Sabha candidates for Tamil Nadu.

—*ANI*

Vijayakanth's son among DMDK's five candidates for LS polls

CHENNAI, 22 MARCH

Late DMDK founder Vijayakanth's son V Vijaya Prabakar is among the five candidates announced by the party for 19 April Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu. DMDK is fighting the polls as part of the AIADMK-led alliance. Senior party leader and former MLA P Parthasarathy is among the other candidates named by DMDK.—PTI

AIADMK manifesto to give Rs 3k to women headed families

CHENNAI, 22 MARCH

Opposition AIADMK on Friday in its manifesto for 19 April Lok Sabha elections promised among other things to ensure Rs 3,000 monthly financial aid to women heads of economically backward families across the country. An alternative exam for NEET is among the 113 electoral assurances made by AIADMK. —PTI

TWO TURNCOATS IN TDP'S FIRST LIST

AMARAVATI, 22 MARCH

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) on Friday announced their first list of 13 candidates for the Lok Sabha polls in Andhra Pradesh, which included two YSR Congress MPs who defected from the party recently.

The former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu-led party also announced the third list of TDP candidates for 11 more Assembly segments.

Naidu said the new set of 11 Assembly candidates and 13 Lok Sabha candidates have been zeroed in after taking opinions from the public.

Narasaraopeta YSRCP Lok Sabha member L Sri Krishna Devarayulu has been fielded from the same constituency while V Prabhakar Reddy, YSRCP Rajya Sabha member, will contest from Nellore.

T Krishna Prasad, who will contest from the Bapatla Lok Sabha constituency, is a former IPS officer and was earlier in the BJP.

—*PTI*

HC nixes Cong plea on tax assessment

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Delhi High Court on Friday dismissed the petitions moved by Indian National Congress (INC) against the Income Tax Department order opening assessment proceedings for years 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

The bench of Justice Yashwant Verma and Justice Purushaindra Kumar Kaurav passed the order and dismissed the plea.

Senior Advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi appeared for Congress party and Special Counsel Zoheb Hossain appeared for Income Tax Department in the matter.

Singhvi submitted that the reassessment action of the IT Department is "barred by limitation" as they could have gone back to a maximum of six assessment years.

After the bench's query IT Department apprised the court that as per the seized material, the amount is about Rs 520 crores.

INC also challenged four further years re-assessment initiated by the IT Department. Court is to hear that petition on Thursday.

Last week, Court upheld the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) order refusing to stay on the Income Tax notice for recovery of more than Rs 105 crore as an outstanding tax against INC. The Court while upholding the ITAT order, granted liberty to the Petitioner. Congress to move the Appellate Tribunal afresh with the grievance.

In the complaint with ITAT, Congress said the Income Tax Department has enforced its law by encashing some of the balances lying with the banks without waiting for the outcome of the hearing. —*ANI*

Mukul Sangma will join BJP after polls: Cong

SHILLONG, 22 MARCH

Meghalaya Congress president Vincent H Pala said his party did not go for an alliance with TMC in the state as its leader Mukul Sangma will join BJP after the Lok Sabha polls.

Eleven Congress MLAs led by Sangma joined TMC in 2022, following which it became the main Opposition party in the state overnight. West Bengal-based party won only five seats in the 2023 assembly elections.

Pala alleged that TMC in the state was working as the "B-team" of BJP. "Why should we sacrifice? Today, we will tell our people to vote for TMC, tomorrow if they go to BJP, we will fall prey to that ideas of BJP," he said. He said Congress would do better than the TMC in the Garo Hills in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. —*PTI*

Mukul Sangma ***PHOTO: PTI***

BJP TO GO SOLO IN ODISHA POLLS

BHUBANESWAR, 22 MARCH

BJP will go solo in the Lok Sabha and assembly elections in Odisha, state party president Manmohan Samal said on Friday.

Talks on pre-poll alliance were being held between the ruling BJD and Opposition BJP for the past few days. "BJP will fight this election alone in all 21 Lok Sabha and 147 Assembly seats to create a developed India and a developed Odisha under the visionary leadership of PM Narendra Modi to fulfil the hopes, aspirations and aspirations of four and a half crore Odiyas," Samal said. —*PTI*

TMC lodges complaint against WB guv

KOLKATA, 22 MARCH

Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Friday filed a complaint with the Election Commission (EC) against West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose, accusing him of unlawfully meddling in the upcoming Lok Sabha poll process and trying to run a parallel office similar to EC.

Hitting out at Raj Bhavan occupant for launching a new portal 'Log Sabha' to listen to the grievances of voters and directly connect with them during the polls, the TMC said it not only undermines the power of EC, but takes away its authority to address grievances, leading to unnecessary confusion among the masses.

"In such circumstances, we call upon you to restrain CV Ananda Bose from running a parallel electioneering system of so-called reporting of complaints and supervising the elections under the name and style of Log Sabha," the letter said.

It must be ensured that the governor is not allowed to interfere with the electioneering process and the powers and functions of ECI, it added.

Bose had on Sunday launched a portal called 'Log Sabha' to listen to the grievances of voters and directly connect with them during the polls.

—*PTI*

GOVERNOR BUDGES

Ponmudy sworn in as Minister

CHENNAI, 22 MARCH

Senior DMK leader K Ponmudy was on Friday sworn in as Minister by Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi, a day after the Supreme Court's nudge.

About three months after he lost his post following his conviction by the Madras High Court on 19 December 2023 in a disproportionate assets case, Ponmudy is now again the Tamil Nadu Minister for Higher Education.

In a simple ceremony at the Raj Bhavan, Ravi administered the oath of office and secrecy to Ponmudy in the presence of Chief Minister MK Stalin and a couple of other Ministers including Udhayanidhi Stalin and Ma Subramanian.

Ponmudy was assigned higher education portfolio, which was briefly held by Backward Classes Minister R S Rajakannappan.

The subject of Khadi and Village Industries Board held previously by Rajakannappan has been restored to him.

Ponmudy's swearing-in as Minister marks the end of a face-off between Stalin and Ravi. While Stalin had on March 13 written to Ravi to swear-in Ponmudy as Minister and allot him higher education, it was declined by Governor who said Ponmudy's conviction had only been suspended and not set aside. Following this, the DMK regime approached the Supreme Court.

Hearing the matter, the apex court expressed "serious concern" over the conduct of Governor Ravi as he refused to reinduct Ponmudi even after it suspended his conviction. The Supreme Court directed him to decide the issue within 24 hours.

Observing that Ravi was defying the top court's order, a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud wondered how the governor can say that Ponmudy's reinduction will be against constitutional morality.

Raising technical objections to Tamil Nadu's plea, Venkataramani had said the application (against the governor's refusal to reinstate Ponmudy) has been moved as an interlocutory application in a pending writ petition raising a different issue on bills cleared by the state legislature but pending with the Raj Bhavan. —*PTI*

Senior DMK leader K Ponmudy ***PHOTO: @KPonmudiMLA/X***

Veteran journalist Zafar Agha dies in Delhi hospital

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Former National Herald editor-in-chief Zafar Agha died following a brief illness at a south Delhi hospital early Friday. He was 70.Agha, who began his career as a journalist with Link Magazine in 1979, is survived by his son Moonis. He died at Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj. His final stint as a journalist was with the National Herald group, first as editor of Urdu daily Qaumi Awaz and then as editor-in-chief of National Herald.—*PTI*

UP man booked for robbery dies during questioning

BAGHPAT, 22 MARCH

A 40-year-old man was suddenly taken ill while he was being questioned in a robbery case at a police station here and died during treatment at a hospital, police said on Friday. Superintendent of Police Arpit Vijayvargiya said the deceased, Praveen, was among three people booked for robbery following a complaint by an advocate Tejveer Singh.The incident took place here on 16 March when Singh was going home three men on bike-allegedly looted Rs 50,000. —*PTI*

Kolkata building collapse: Death toll rises to 11

KOLKATA, 22 MARCH

The body of another person, who had been missing since the collapse of a five-storey building in the city's Garden Reach area, was recovered by rescue workers from underneath the debris, four days after the mishap, taking the death toll to 11, police said on Friday. The deceased was identified as Abdul Rauf Nizami, also known as Sheru, a friend of the arrested promoter who oversaw the building project, police added. "The body was recoverelast night,"officer said. —*PTI*

Elvish Yadav gets bail in snake venom case

NOIDA, 22 MARCH

Gautam Buddh Nagar court Friday granted bail to controversial YouTuber Siddharth Yadav alias Elvish Yadav in suspected drugs case, his lawyers said. Yadav was arrested by the Noida Police on Sunday in connection with its probe into suspected use of snake venoms as recreational drugs in parties he hosted."The court heard the bail application and granted bail in the case. He will have to furnish two bail bonds of Rs 50,000 each," Advocate Prashant Rathi said. —*PTI*

MP: ASI begins survey of Bhojshala complex

Both Hindus and Muslims consider the site a place of worship

DHAR, 22 MARCH

A team of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Friday began a survey of the controversial Bhojshala/Kamal Maula Mosque complex situated in the tribal-dominated Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh.

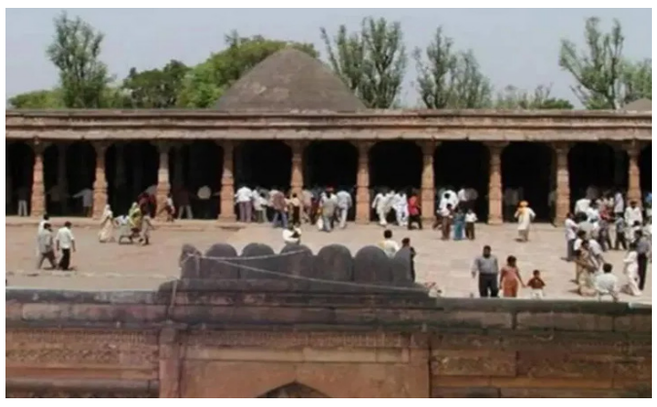
The ASI team, comprising more than a dozen members, reached the complex in the morning. It was accompanied by senior local police and district administration officials.

Both Hindus and Muslims consider the site a place of worship.

Asked whether Muslims would be allowed to offer prayers at the site, Dhar Superintendent of Police (SP) Manoj Kumar Singh said 'puja' on Tuesdays and 'namaz' on Fridays will be held as per practice.

A 15-member team reached the site early in the morning to survey the Bhojshala complex, Goyal said.

"Today they did the ground-level preparations for conducting the survey. As directed by the high court, new technologies like GPS and carbon-dating equipment were used by the team," Goyal said.Meanwhile, a Special Leave Petition (SLP) filed by the Muslim community against the HC order in the Supreme Court on the issue was listed for hearing on 1 April, lawyer Shirish Dube, representing Hindu Front for Justice, told reporters. He said the SC refused to hear the matter on Friday as mentioned by their lawyers.The survey will continue as directed by the High Court, he added.



The Madhya Pradesh has directed ASI to carry out 'scientific survey' of Bhojshala complex within six weeks *PHOTO: PTI*

The Madhya Pradesh High Court, on 11 March, directed ASI to carry out within six weeks a 'scientific survey' of the Bhojshala complex, a medieval-era monument that Hindus believe is a temple of Goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati) and the Muslim community calls Kamal Maula Mosque.

.Speaking to reporters, Dhar town's 'Shahar Qazi' Waqar Sadiq said that no authorized member of the Muslim community was present during the survey, though Kamal Moula Mosque's representative Abdul Samad was supposed to be there.But it seems ASI has not given him any notice and for this the central agency is responsible, Sadiq claimed.Sadiq said ASI reports of 1902 and 1903 are in its records and the first report on the site mentioned that "this is a mosque".

About the SC not taking up their matter after being mentioned, he said dates keep moving back and forth and the community will get a hearing.

Sadiq said they have documents to show that namaz can be offered at the site five times a day, but they have restrained themselves in the interest of "peace and harmony".

Stressing that there is no dispute with the Hindus, he said, "Only 13-14 people, who are the self-proclaimed leaders of the community, are creating problems. Now we think that we have to insist on starting namaz five times a day at the site. We will move the High Court and the supreme court on this," he said. —*PTI*

HIMALAYAN FIGHT FOR STATEHOOD

Over 250 protesters along with activist Sonam Wangchuk defy -15°C temperatures in Leh as the "Climate Fast" enters its 16th day on Friday. Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk in his latest video appealed for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

GUJ MAN TRIES TO BURN MUTT IN BHARUCH

BHARUCH, 22 MARCH

A man allegedly tried to set ablaze a Shankaracharya 'mutt' (monastic institution) in Bharuch town of Gujarat early on Friday and left behind a message threatening to harm its priest, said the police. Following the incident, which was captured on a CCTV camera, police rushed to the spot and launched a probe to nab the culprit, said Bharuch district superintendent of police, Mayur Chavda.

The religious institution is located in the Navchowki Ovara area on the banks of the Narmada river."Around 5.30am, a person threw some material on the door of the math in an attempt to set it ablaze. CCTV has captured the act. We have formed various teams to conduct a detailed investigation into the case. A First Information Report (FIR) has also been registered in this regard," Chavda told reporters. —*PTI*

SUCCESSFUL MISSION

Pushpak, a Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV-TD), makes a landing on the runway at Aeronautical Test Range, in Chitradurga *PHOTO: PTI*

ISRO hits milestone with reusable launch vehicle

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

ISRO on Friday said it has achieved a major milestone in the area of reusable launch vehicle technology through the RLV LEX-02 landing experiment.

This is the second of the series conducted at Aeronautical Test Range, Chitradurga, in Karnataka at 7.10am.

After the RLV-LEX-01 mission was accomplished last year, RLV-LEX-02 demonstrated the autonomous landing capability of reusable launch vehicle (RLV) from off-nominal initial conditions at release from helicopter, the Bengaluru-headquartered space agency said in a statement.

"The RLV was made to undertake more difficult maneuvers with dispersions, correct both cross-range and downrange and land on the runway in a fully autonomous mode," it said.The winged vehicle, called Pushpak, was lifted by an Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter and was released from 4.5km altitude. After release at a distance of 4km from the runway, Pushpak autonomously approached the runway along with cross-range corrections. It landed precisely on the runway and came to a halt using its brake parachute, landing gear brakes and nose wheel steering system, ISRO said.

It added that this mission successfully simulated the approach and high-speed landing conditions of RLV returning from space."With this second mission, ISRO has re-validated the indigenously developed technologies in the areas of navigation, control systems, landing gear and deceleration systems essential for performing a high-speed autonomous landing of a space-returning vehicle," the space agency said. —*PTI*

Elusive tiger captured after weeks of roaming in Kerala, dead

Kannur, 22 March

An elusive tiger, roaming around in a human settlement here for more than two weeks, that was successfully tranquilised and captured by Forest officials a day ago, died hours later, the Forest department said on Friday.According to a senior forest official of the district, the tiger had puncture wounds on its chest and a lot of pus in its upper respiratory tract."Only after we get all those reports would we be able to conclude what the exact cause of death was," he said. —PTI

Bihar's bridge collapse kills 1, 9 injured

SUPAUL, 22 MARCH

One person was killed and nine people injured as a portion of an under-construction bridge collapsed in Bihar's Supaul district in the early hours of Friday, officials said. The 10.2km bridge was being constructed by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) over the Koshi river between Bheja in Madhubani and Bakaur in Supaul district, they said.

NHAI Regional Officer YB Singh told PTI that 10 labourers were trapped under the debris after the accident.

"Unfortunately, one person died on the way to the hospital, and the other nine were rescued with minor injuries. They are out of danger now," he said.

"Adequate compensation for the deceased as well as injured victims is being arranged. Experts have been briefed and asked to assess the reason for the accident and suggest necessary remedial measures. Senior NHAI officers have rushed to the site to take immediate action on the matter," he added.

PHOTO: PTI

The bridge has 171 piers, and the span between piers 153 and 154 collapsed, he said.

Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha, who holds the Road Construction portfolio, said that an inquiry has been ordered and action will be taken against those responsible for the incident. —*PTI*

Rights Commission files case against Kerala dancer

T'PURAM, 22 MARCH

The Kerala State Human Rights Commission here on Friday initiated a case against Kalamandalam Satyabhama junior, a senior Mohiniyattam dancer, over her controversial racist remarks allegedly against a fellow artist on a YouTube channel.

State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) member VK Beena Kumari directed Thrissur district police chief and the government's Secretary for Culture to look into the statement by the dancer and submit a report within 15 days, a statement issued by the Commission said.

The action was taken by the Commission on its own based on media reports, it said, adding that a human rights activist Guinness Madasamy had also filed a complaint on the same issue.

As the video of the racial remarks by Satyabhama went viral on social media and was aired on news channels on Thursday, noted Mohiniyattam dancer Dr RLV Ramakrishnan had alleged that her comments were directed at him, and threatened to initiate legal action against her. Ministers Saji Cheriyan, R Bindu, Veena George, Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly VD Satheesan, BJP state chief K Surendran, among others, had condemned the statement.Her statements were severely criticised by many on social media. —*PTI*

HC admits CBI's plea against A Raja's acquittal

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The Delhi High Court on Friday admitted a CBI appeal challenging the acquittal of former telecom minister A Raja and others in the 2G spectrum allocation scam case.Justice Dinesh Kumar Sharma said that on the basis of the material on record and the submissions made by the lawyers for the parties, a prima facie case is made out by the CBI and the appeal needs to be heard in detail.

"This court, after going through the material on record, the impugned judgment and the submissions made by the counsel for the parties, is of the opinion that a prima facie case has been made out which requires deeper examination of the entire evidence. There is an arguable case to convert the leave to appeal to a regular appeal."

"Leave to appeal is granted. List the appeal for hearing in May," the judge said.

The High Court passed the judgement on the CBI's "leave to appeal", six years after it was filed.

While the appeal was filed by the CBI in March 2018, the aspect of 'leave to appeal' was heard by seven different judges before coming to Justice Sharma who reserved the verdict on 14 March.

The special court had, on 21 December, 2017, acquitted Raja, DMK MP Kanimozhi and others in the CBI and ED cases related to the 2G scam.

The CBI had earlier contended before the High Court that there are glaring illegalities in the trial court's judgment acquitting all the accused —*PTI*

AHEAD OF COP30

'Weather kids' raise concern for climate

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Television screens in over 80 countries, including India, flashed visuals of young children presenting a shocking but scientifically grounded forecast for the year 2050 to encourage global climate action.

This is part of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) new "Weather Kids" campaign, created in partnership with the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and The Weather Channel, the flagship consumer brand of The Weather Company.

The young television meteorologists featured in the campaign warn viewers about the catastrophic effects of rising temperatures on both people and the global economy, including a projected impact on 94 per cent of the world's children, threats to food security, and a rise in taxpayers' bills globally.

The COP30 will be an opportunity to get world on path and limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celcius *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The segment ends with a powerful plea from the children: "It's not just a weather report to us. It is our future."

The campaign encourages adults to sign a pledge to act through voting, making sustainable financial decisions, and educating themselves on climate solutions and climate action in their own country.

The COP30 will also mark the 10-year anniversary of the landmark Paris Agreement of 2015 and is a critical opportunity to get the world on a path to limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius from the pre-industrial levels, as countries submit a new round of national climate plans known as 'Nationally Determined Contributions' (NDCs). —*PTI*

SC sets aside trial court order over Bloomberg's 'defamatory' article

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Friday set aside a trial court's order directing international media group Bloomberg to take down an allegedly defamatory news article against Zee Entertainment.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by Bloomberg against the 14 March order of the Delhi High Court, which dismissed its appeal against the trail court order.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said the error committed by the trial judge had been perpetuated by the High Court.

"The error committed by the trial judge had been perpetuated by the High Court. Merely recording that a prima-facie case exists for a grant of injunction, the balance of convenience lies in Zee's favour and that an irreparable injury would be caused would not amount to application of mind in the case," the bench, also comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said while granting liberty to Zee to approach the trial court afresh with its prayer seeking injunction.

Reacting on the apex court order, Bloomberg News spokesperson said, "We are very encouraged by today's decision from the Supreme Court of India, and we continue to stand by this story." —*PTI*

RANGWALI HOLI

A young woman drenched in colours celebrates Holi, in Nadia, on Friday, ***PHOTO:PTI***

Not much for unemployed, then why is BJP favoured?

Modi effectively constructed, maintained coalition, has ability to appeal with targeted message ***PHOTO: PTI***

India will soon hold the biggest election ever conducted, starting on April 19 and running through early June. Almost 950 million registered voters will be able to cast ballots to elect the 543 members of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament.

The result is not a foregone conclusion, but most analysts expect Narendra Modi's BJP to win another five years in office. After a decade in power, the opinion polls suggest Modi is still well regarded by many Indians and the main opposition parties do not command wide support.

Slow growth, too few jobs

This situation might strike some as odd. Modi government's record is mixed – especially in managing the economy – and has disappointed many voters.

To be sure, as the Prime Minister frequently reminds voters, India has grown faster than many competitors in recent years. But BJP came to office ten years ago promising double-digit growth rates and it has never achieved that goal.

Why, then, do so many Indians still support the Modi government?

Part of the answer lies in BJP's ability to appeal to multiple constituencies with targeted messages.

Ruling India effectively depends on constructing and maintaining coalitions – either coalitions of parties or coalitions of voters. Modi's BJP does both.

It is supported by several smaller parties in parliament, but more important in terms of winning elections, is the patchwork quilt of different groups of voters it can marshal.

For decades, they have campaigned to end what they perceive as unreasonable special protections given to religious minorities, including for places of worship and faith-based divorce and child custody laws, as well as the autonomous status of the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Soon after, the government announced a controversial new law will come into effect that will allow Hindus, Sikhs and others fleeing neighbouring Muslim-majority countries to gain Indian citizenship, but may permit the deportation of Muslims deemed to be illegal immigrants.

And many believe a "uniform civil code" will be next, imposing common marriage, alimony and custody arrangements on all Indian citizens, regardless of religion.

Courting women and urban, middle-class voters

Hindu nationalist core is powerful, but it is not large enough to give BJP all the seats it needs to govern.

For that reason, the party has also tried to win over the growing urban middle class. This group is less interested in cultural issues and more concerned with good governance, as well as India's standing in the world.

To appeal to these groups in recent years, the Modi government has doubled the funding for a rural income guarantee scheme, and launched other programs, including one to provide midday meals to schoolchildren.

It has shepherded a new gender quota bill through parliament, which will require one third of Lok Sabha seats to be reserved for women from 2029, among other measures.

A divided and weak Opposition

Modi government's success in winning over these groups is impressive, but it must be noted the BJP has never gained more than 40% of the popular vote in a national election. If it faced a united and effective opposition, it might struggle to win office.

Happily for BJP, India's opposition parties are divided and weak. If they could join forces and put their support behind a single, strong candidate to challenge the BJP in individual districts, they might win more seats

Worse still, the fragile opposition alliance has not yet named a credible alternative candidate for the prime ministership.

Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family that led India after independence, is an obvious choice, but is widely seen as an ineffectual dilettante. Successful regional politicians like West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee have limited reach beyond their own states.

Meanwhile, Modi's personal popularity is high. His modest background and personal charisma still appeal to the young and the aspirational, especially in caste groups historically excluded from power and wealth.

Defeating such a dominant figure will be hard, if not impossible.

—The Conversation

LETTERS

write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR ساڈا

Global warming could add 3.2 per cent to food inflation

Greenhouse emission could limit risk to economy ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

- International reseasrch suggests that the pressure on overall inflation could be 0.3-1.2 percentage points at the temperatures that the world will likely see in 2035.

Global warming could add up to 3.2 percentage points to food inflation every year in a decade's time, and will affect the Global South more than high-income countries, according to a new international research.

It also projected that the pressure on overall inflation could be 0.3-1.2 percentage points at the temperatures that the world will likely see in 2035.

Researchers said the projections suggested that rising temperatures increase inflation all-year long in countries at low-latitude while in those at higher latitudes, inflation due to rising temperatures occurs only in summers.

Further, the authors, including those from Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Germany, estimated that heat extremes during the summer of 2022 raised food inflation in Europe by 0.67 per cent, an increase that could be amplified by 30-50 per cent under 2035 warming scenarios.

The researchers said that Africa and South America are likely to face a greater impact, but acknowledged the lack of detailed information in South East Asia on detailed information regarding price aggregates at monthly timescales.

Their findings are published in the journal Communications Earth and Environment.

"Combining the uncertainty arising from empirical specification, emission scenario and range of climate model projections results in a range of potential pressures on food inflation of 0.92-3.23 p.p.p.y. (percentage points per year) by 2035, and of 0.32-1.18 p.p.p.y. for headline inflation, on average across the world," they said.

"These results therefore provide robust evidence that projected global warming would cause persistent upward exogenous pressures on inflation of considerable magnitudes already during the next few decades, independent of future emission trajectories and assuming ceteris paribus (all else being equal)," they added.

For the study, the researchers analysed monthly national consumer price indices and weather data across 121 countries from 1991-2020.

They combined the results with projections from a physical climate model to estimate how rising temperatures impacted inflation between 2030 and 2060.

Even as climate change is likely to increase the price of food in the future, the authors suggested that mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and technology-based adaptations could substantially limit this risk to the global economy.

—PTI

Rising temperatures have increased inflation in countries at low-latitude ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Ladakh: Protesters march in freezing cold for statehood

Young people in the region are concerned about not getting government jobs ***PHOTO: PTI***

In the high-altitude Ladakh region, thousands are protesting in sub-zero temperatures. In 2019, the government fulfilled their long-standing demand for a region separate from Kashmir. But since 2020, they have frequently taken to streets, accusing the government of "betrayal" and unkept promises. Srinagar-based freelance journalist Auqib Javeed reports on what's changed.

Ladakh, the northern-most region, is a desert inhabited by 300,000 people from Muslim and Buddhist communities. Leh is dominated by Buddhists while the Kargil region is inhabited by Shia Muslims.

For decades, Buddhists demanded a separate region for its people, while those in Kargil wanted to be integrated with the Muslim-majority region of Kashmir.

In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government revoked Article 370 of the Constitution which accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir and gave it significant autonomy. The state was then divided into two parts - Ladakh, and Jammu and Kashmir - and both are Union territories.

A year later, Kargil and Leh districts joined hands and formed the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), aimed at addressing people's concerns. The civil society groups have held massive rallies against the government.

Their demands include statehood for Ladakh, jobs, protection of their land and resources, and a parliamentary seat each for Leh and Kargil districts.

They also want implementation of the Sixth Schedule, a constitutional provision that protects tribal populations and allows them to set up autonomous organisations that frame laws on land, health and agriculture. Nearly 97 per cent of Ladakh's population is tribal.

Home Ministry set up a committee to discuss these demands, but locals say there has been no progress.

Young people in the region are also concerned about not getting government jobs.

Padma Stanzin, who heads Ladakh Students' Environmental Action Forum (Leaf), says since 2019, not a single person has been recruited in a senior government role. "We fear our jobs will be taken over by outsiders," she adds.

Ladakh's BJP MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal did not respond to BBC's request for comments.

Ladakh holds significant geostrategic importance for India as it shares borders with both China and Pakistan, the two countries which strongly condemned India's decision to revoke Article 370. While Kashmir witnessed a protracted armed uprising against Delhi's rule starting in late 1980s, the militancy never spread to Ladakh.

In the 1999 Kargil war with Pakistan, residents in Ladakh volunteered support by supplying food and other essentials to Indian soldiers.

Residents now wonder if they are paying the price for being "loyal".

"The spirit of that voluntarism will not remain if the government hurts the sentiments of the people," says Sonam Wangchuk, an engineer, innovator and climate activist, who has worked for years to address local community needs.

Wangchuk, who gained fame after Bollywood star Aamir Khan played a character based on him in the 2009 blockbuster Three Idiots, is on a 21-day-long fast "to remind the government of its promises to safeguard Ladakh's environment and tribal indigenous culture".

People of Ladakh, he says, have offered support to Indian soldiers, including to personnel from the plains who have struggled to adapt to high altitude. "Any kind of disturbance will impact this spirit," he adds.

Experts say China and Pakistan would watch for any sign of "weakness" in the region.

"Unrest and discontent, especially if sustained, is something that Beijing and Islamabad could try to exploit," says Michael Kugelman, director of Washington-based think-tank South Asia Institute at the Wilson Centre.

Beijing didn't recognise the creation of Ladakh as a Union territory in 2019. The region lies along the disputed 3,440km-long de facto border along the Himalayas - called the Line of Actual Control, or LAC - which is poorly demarcated.

Since 2020, tensions between India and China have been high after their forces clashed in the Galwan river valley in Ladakh, which left at least 20 Indian soldiers dead.

Following the clashes, both Delhi and Beijing increased troop movement and built massive military infrastructure along the LAC. China launched incursions in Ladakh, claiming over 1,000 sq km of India-claimed territory. India has repeatedly denied China's claim.

Incidents of Chinese soldiers entering Ladakh and restricting residents from grazing their herds have added to local grievances.

In January, a group of local herders clashed with Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers after they were prevented from taking their cattle to traditional grazing lands near the LAC.

Kugelman argues that while India cannot afford an unstable Ladakh, it is also not possible to reverse the changes made in 2019.

Delhi's position has always been that the repeal of Article 370 and moves associated with it were final and would bring an end to any disputes and instability within the regions affected.

Praveen Donthi, a senior analyst for the International Crisis Group, a Delhi think-tank, says this is most likely why India refuses to extend powers to the local government in Ladakh.

Ladakh residents, however, hope the strength of their unity - the joint action by the Muslim and Buddhist communities - will eventually force the authorities to address their grievances.

"Our unity will compel the government to hear us and address our demands," says Jigmat Paljor, a student-activist in Leh. "They can't ignore us for too long." —BBC

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA

Islamic State says it bombed Afghan bank

ISLAMABAD, 22 MARCH

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a deadly bombing that targeted Taliban trying to collect their salaries at a bank in southern Afghanistan. The bombing on Thursday at a branch of New Kabul Bank in Kandahar city killed three people and wounded 12 others. All of the victims were people who had gathered there to collect their monthly salaries, said Inamullah Samangani, head of the government's Kandahar Information and Culture Department. The Islamic State group's affiliate, a major Taliban rival, has conducted attacks on schools, hospitals, mosques and Shiite areas throughout Afghanistan. The militant group said the suicide bomber detonated his explosive belt among the Taliban gathered near the bank to receive salaries. *—AP*

Strong earthquake rocks Indonesia's Java Island

JAKARTA, 22 MARCH

A strong and shallow undersea earthquake shook the eastern side of Indonesia's main island of Java on Friday, causing some damage but no immediate reports of casualties. The US Geological Survey said the quake measured 6.4 and struck at a depth of 8.5km north of Paciran in East Java province. Two other quakes of lesser magnitudes had struck the same area earlier Friday and were also felt in Surabaya, the nearest city, while buildings in Jakarta, the capital, swayed for several seconds after the third earthquake. Authorities said a house and a village town hall collapsed in Tuban. Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency said there was no danger of a tsunami but warned of possible aftershocks. *—AP*

Meloni seeks $100K compensation over deepfake porn pics

ROME, 22 MARCH

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni has been asked to testify in court on 2 July in the trial of two men who are accused of making deepfake pornographic images using her face and posting them online. Meloni, who is listed as an injured party in the trial in Sassari in Sardinia, is seeking USD 1,08,212 in symbolic damages and will donate any award to an Interior Ministry fund for women victims of domestic violence, her attorney Maria Giulia Marongiu said in an email Friday to The Associated Press. According to the ANSA news agency, Italy's postal police in 2020 identified the father and son who allegedly uploaded the deepfake images to a US-based porn site by tracing the data to one of their cell phones. *—AP*

Australia pays $3bn to UK for nuke submarines

SYDNEY, 22 MARCH

Australia is set to provide USD 3 billion to British industry to support the construction of nuclear-powered submarines and ensure its new fleet arrives on time, the two countries said on Friday. The announcement came a day after the two countries signed a defence and security pact to better meet challenges such as China's increased activity in the South China Sea and South Pacific. UK Defence Minister Grant Shapps said the submarine programme was expensive but necessary. The 10-year deal announced at an annual ministers' gathering will boost capacity at the Rolls-Royce factory in Derby, UK, to build the nuclear reactors that will propel the submarines to be built by BAE Systems in Adelaide, Australia. The Virginia-class submarines will be primarily from a UK design and will have a US weapons system onboard. *—AP*

Assault on Rafah is a mistake: Blinken

BiBi tells US that Israel will go into Rafah alone

Antony Blinken disembarks from an aircraft as he arrives in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

CAIRO, 22 MARCH

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday a major Israeli ground assault on the southern Gaza town of Rafah would be "a mistake" and "unnecessary" to defeating Hamas, underscoring the further souring of relations between the United States and Israel.

Blinken, on his sixth urgent Mideast mission since the war began in October, spoke after huddling with top Arab diplomats in Cairo for discussions on efforts for a ceasefire and Gaza's post-conflict future. He said an "immediate, sustained ceasefire" with the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas was urgently needed and that gaps were narrowing in indirect negotiations that US, Egypt and Qatar have spent weeks mediating. Those negotiations are to continue at a senior level in Qatar on Friday.

Blinken heads to Israel on Friday to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his War Cabinet. The growing disagreements between Netanyahu and President Joe Biden over the prosecution of the war will likely overshadow those talks — particularly over Netanyahu's determination to launch a ground assault on Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians have sought refuge from devastating Israeli ground and air strikes further north.

Netanyahu has said that without an invasion of Rafah, Israel can't achieve its goal of destroying . A major offensive would mean more civilian deaths and worsen Gaza's humanitarian crisis, Blinken said, adding that his talks on Rafah in Israel on Friday and discussions between senior US and Israeli officials next week in Washington will be to share ideas for alternative action.

But Netanyahu, on a roughly 45-minute call with GOP senators on Wednesday, pledged to ignore warnings about a Rafah operation. He also took aim at Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's condemnation last week of the civilian death toll in Gaza and his call for new elections in Israel in a speech that Biden later said was "good." *—AP*

ISRAEL JAILS 7,350 PALESTINIANS SINCE 7 OCTOBER

JERUSALEM, 22 MARCH

In early November, the Israeli authorities summoned Hashim Matar to the police station in occupied East Jerusalem. For 10 days, he was interrogated about whether he supported Hamas and was a member of the Palestinian group. Between questioning, Matar was locked in a small room with other detainees, where they were punched, kicked and beaten with batons.

"Lots of people had their [sternum] or heads broken, often gushing with blood," Matar, a 54-year-old man, told Al Jazeera three months after he was released from detention. "We weren't even treated like animals. At least animals are treated with some sort of dignity."

Israel has taken thousands of Palestinians captive since Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October, in which 1,139 people were killed and about 250 abducted. Since then, the number of Palestinians arrested in the occupied West Bank exceeds 7,350 people, according to the Addameer monitor in Ramallah. While some Palestinians have been released, 9,100 remain captive. That's a sharp uptick from the 5,200 that were in Israeli prisons before 7 October. These figures do not include the thousands of adults and children the Israeli Army has tortured and interrogated in makeshift prisons across Gaza. *—Al Jazeera*

Russia attacks Ukraine power units

Moscow targets Kyiv's main hydroelectric unit

The attack killed at least three people PHOTO: PTI

KYIV, 22 MARCH

Russia attacked electrical power facilities in much of Ukraine, including the country's largest hydroelectric plant, causing widespread outages and killing at least three people, officials said on Friday.

Energy Minister German Galushchenko said the nighttime drone and rocket attacks were "the largest attack on the Ukrainian energy sector in recent times. The goal is not just to damage, but to try again, like last year, to cause a large-scale disruption of the country's energy system".

The attacks caused a fire at the Dnipro Hydroelectric Station, which supplies electricity to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest nuclear power installation. The main 750-kilovolt power line to the plant was cut off, International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Grossi said early Friday. A lower-power backup line was working, he said.

The plant is occupied by Russian troops, and fighting around the plant has been a constant concern because of the potential for a nuclear accident.

The dam at the hydroelectric station was not in danger of breaching, the country's hydroelectric authority said. A dam breach could not only disrupt supplies to the nuclear plant but would potentially cause severe flooding similar to what occurred last year when a major dam at Kakhovka further down the Dnieper collapsed.

One person was killed and at least eight injured in the Russian attack, said Zaporizhzhia regional governor Ivan Fedorov. Attacks on energy facilities in the Kharkiv region caused blackouts, and other attacks were reported in areas of western Ukraine far from the front lines. Two people died in the Khmelnytskyi region, according to the Internal Affairs Ministry.

The governor of the Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said a woman was killed when a shell hit nearby while she was walking her dogs and that two others were injured. The town of Tetkino in the Kursk region was shelled, injuring one person, said Gov. Roman Starovoit. *—AP*

EU MULLS WAYS TO GET MORE ARMS INTO UKRAINE

BRUSSELS, 22 MARCH

European Union leaders on Thursday debated fresh ways to help boost arms and ammunition production for Ukraine amid a new sense of urgency about the future of the war-torn country.

Ukraine's munition stocks are desperately low, while Russia has more and better-armed troops. There is also a growing awareness that the EU must provide for its own security, with election campaigning in the US raising questions about Washington's commitment to its allies.

At the same time, political rhetoric is at fever pitch as the campaign for Europe-wide elections on 6 June gathers pace, with security a major issue. As they talk up the need to fund the defence industry, both at home and in Ukraine, many leaders are also trying to convince citizens that budgets could be tightened elsewhere.

New plans are on the EU's table, notably to use the profits from frozen Russian assets to buy arms and ammunition for Ukraine.

The 27-nation EU is holding around 210 billion euros in Russian central bank assets, most of it frozen in Belgium, in retaliation for Moscow's war against Ukraine. The bloc estimates that the money could generate profits of up to 3 billion euros each year. *—AP*

HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERN

'US must do its part to urge India to correct its course'

WASHINGTON, 22 MARCH

US Congress must do its part to urge the Indian government to correct the course, and reconsider policies and laws, including counter-terrorism laws that are "inconsistent" with the obligations India has acquired through its ratification of key human rights treaties, an influential American lawmaker said Thursday.

On 19 April, multi-phase general elections will kick off in India to determine the country's political direction for the next five years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third term, said Congressman James McGovern, Co-Chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, during a hearing on human rights in India.

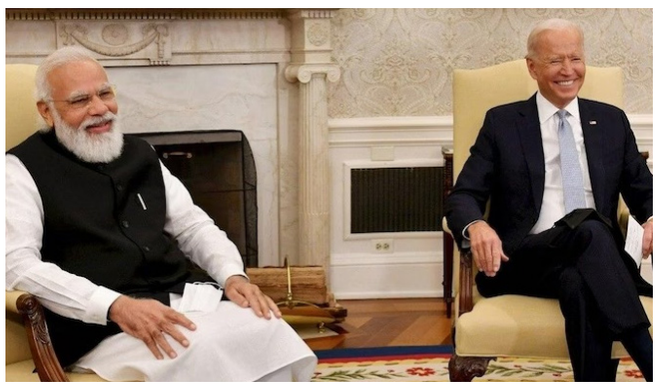
"The communal violence between ethnic Hindus and Christians in Manipur is just but one example," he said.

In his remarks, Congressman Chris Smith, Co-Chair of the committee said that India is a country of particular concern. "I would put an H in there, huge particular concern for their egregious behaviour. And Modi looks at what we do and say, they don't care," he said.

Carolyn Nash, Asia Advocacy Director, Amnesty International USA told lawmakers that the US government has recognised acts of transnational repression by the Government of India in Canada, which led to the assassination of an activist, as well as attempts here in the United States.

"I can provide documentation of the government's intensifying efforts to weaponise and codify into law intolerance and hate of particular concern are the expansion of the government's abuse of vague and overbroad laws to shut down dissent, the increases in leaders' use of hate speech and vilification of religious groups, and the recent rollout of the CAA and its discriminatory citizenship process, which could set the stage for millions to be deprived of citizenship," Nash told the lawmakers.

"BJP is eager to demonstrate to their base that they are delivering on supremacist promises. We know the lead up to the election will be a particularly dangerous time. We also know that Modi will be particularly sensitive to messages from other governments, and especially from senior leaders," Nash said. *—AP*



On 19 April, multi-phase elections will kick off in India to determine the country's political direction for the next five years PHOTO: PTI

US sues Apple, accuses it of monopoly

WASHINGTON, 22 MARCH

US government has filed a landmark antitrust lawsuit against Apple, in which it accuses the tech giant of maintaining a "broad, sustained and illegal" monopoly over the smartphone market.

Here is what we know about the case and what might happen next:

Why is Apple being sued?
Apple is the largest of the four main tech giants, Amazon, Apple, Meta and Google, all of which have market capitalisations of more than a trillion dollars. The US government argues that Apple "undermines apps, products and services that would otherwise make users less reliant on the iPhone".

What are the main allegations put forth by the Department of Justice?

In its legal challenge, lodged in federal court in New Jersey, the Department of Justice alleges that Apple is illegally preventing competition by restricting access to its hardware and software.

The accusation are:

- **Blocking innovative apps:** It says Apple has disrupted the development of apps that could make it "easier for users to switch between competing platforms".
- **Suppressing mobile cloud streaming services:** It also alleges that the company has prevented the development of cloud streaming apps that would allow consumers to enjoy high-quality video games without having to pay for expensive hardware.
- **Cross-platform messaging apps:** Messages between iPhone and Android phones can be less secure as iMessage does not allow the exchange of encrypted messages.
- **Diminishing the functionality of non-Apple smartwatches:** The suit alleges that this means "users who purchase the Apple Watch face substantial out-of-pocket costs if they do not keep buying iPhones". *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

RAM MANDIR RATH YATRA TO TRAVEL 8K MILES; VISIT 851 TEMPLES IN 48 US STATES

WASHINGTON, 22 MARCH

Ram Mandir Rath Yatra will kick off from Chicago in US on Monday to travel to 851 temples in 48 states, crossing more than 8,000 miles over the next 60 days, organisers said on Thursday.

The rath or chariot built over a Toyota Sienna van will carry statues of Lord Ram, Goddess Sita, Lakshman, and Hanuman, along with special prasadam from the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and kalash of Prana Pratishtha Pujit Akshat, according to Amitabh Mittal, general secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), which is organising the yatra.

The Canada section of the Ratha Yatra – separate one – is being organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of Canada. It will travel to more than 150 temples in Canada.

According to Mittal, several dozen volunteers have registered with the VHPA to help plan and organise this yatra. *—AP*

PAK WOMAN GETS LIFER FOR BURNING QURAN

LAHORE, 22 MARCH

A Pakistani court sentenced a Muslim woman to life in prison after finding her guilty of burning pages of Islam's holy book.

Under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, anyone found guilty of insulting the religion or religious figures can be sentenced up to death. While authorities have yet to carry out a death sentence for blasphemy, just the accusation can provoke riots.

Government prosecutor Mohazib Awais said the woman, Aasiya Bibi, was arrested in 2021 on blasphemy charges after residents claimed she desecrated the Quran by burning its pages. Awais said the judge announced the verdict Wednesday in the eastern city of Lahore. He said Bibi, who has the right to appeal, had denied the charge during her trial.

A Christian woman with the same name was acquitted of blasphemy in 2019 after she spent eight years on death row in Pakistan. She moved to Canada to escape death threats from Islamic extremists upon her release. Wednesday's case involved a different woman.

Domestic and international human rights groups say blasphemy allegations have often been used to intimidate religious minorities and to settle personal scores.

Earlier in March, another court in Gujranwala, Punjab province, sentenced a 22-year-old student to death and gave a teenager a life sentence in two separate cases after finding them guilty of insulting Islam's Prophet Muhammad. *—AP*

Ex-PepsiCo CEO cautions Indians students in US

NEW YORK, 22 MARCH

- She said there are also incidents of some youngsters experimenting with and eventually getting addicted to drugs such as Fentanyl.

Amid a string of tragic and concerning incidents involving Indian students in the US, former CEO of PepsiCo Indra Nooyi has advised them to be "watchful", respect local laws and urged them to not engage in drugs or excessive drinking to ensure their safety and security in this country.

Nooyi, considered among the most powerful and influential business executives globally, issued an over 10-minute long video advising Indian students coming to the US to stay safe and alert and to avoid activities that can land them in trouble. The video was posted on X by the Consulate General of India in New York on Thursday.

Nooyi pleaded with the students coming to the US to "choose your university and course carefully". She added that coming to the US to pursue higher education can be a "cultural sea change" for many because they are away from the comforts of their families, communities and ecosystems.

"So when you come to the United States, be very watchful in the initial months of your landing here, in terms of who you select as friends, the new habits you develop and how you cope with cultural changes because it's easy to get caught up with all the freedoms you have and think that you should experiment with everything. Be very, very careful."

She noted that while Indian students are known for their hard work and success, there are also incidents of some youngsters experimenting with and eventually getting addicted to drugs such as Fentanyl. *—PTI*

SURVIVORS RECALL HORROR

Burkina Faso's security accused of killing civilians on 5 Nov

DAKAR, 22 MARCH

Women slain with babies wrapped against their bodies, lifeless children intertwined together, a 2-month-old face-up on the ground with puppies crawling on his tiny frame. The scenes were horrifying, but the 32-year-old farmer felt he had to document them, as proof of the carnage in his central Burkina Faso village.

More than a dozen relatives were killed on 5 November when security forces attacked with mounted pickup trucks, guns and drones, he told The Associated Press. He said he hid for hours in a neighbour's compound and took a series of photos before fleeing the next morning.

Dozens more were killed that day in Zaongo village, according to his account and that of two other survivors, as well as a UN report citing government figures. The images the man sent AP and the interviews with the three survivors are rare firsthand accounts amid a stark increase in civilian killings by Burkina Faso's security forces as the junta struggles to beat back a growing jihadi insurgency and attacks citizens under the guise of counterterrorism.

Most attacks — including the slaying of children by soldiers at a military base last year, uncovered in an AP investigation — go unpunished and unreported in a nation run by a repressive leadership. *—AP*

More than 20,000 people have been killed since jihadi violence linked to al-Qaida and Islamic State group first hit nation PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Gold tumbles ₹875; silver plunges ₹760

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Gold price tumbled Rs 875 to Rs 66,575 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid weak trends in global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had settled at Rs 67,450 per 10 grams in the previous trade. In addition, silver also plunged Rs 760 to Rs 76,990 per kg against the previous close of Rs 77,750 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 66,575 per 10 grams, down by Rs 875 from the previous day," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,167 per ounce, down USD 35 from the previous day's level. Silver was also trading lower at USD 24.45 per ounce. In the previous trade, it had closed at USD 25.51 per ounce. Comex spot gold has support at USD 2,145/2,130 and resistance at USD 2,178/2,206 per ounce. —*PTI*

RBI offices for govt biz to remain open on 30, 31 March

MUMBAI, 22 MARCH

RBI offices dealing with government business and all designated branches of agency banks will keep their counters open as per normal working hours on Saturday and Sunday for the convenience of taxpayers. Electronic transactions can be done till the stipulated time on both days (30 March and 31 March), the Reserve Bank said in a statement on special measures for the current financial year (2023-24), in wake of annual closing of government accounts. In order to facilitate government receipts and payments, necessary arrangements have also been made to conduct special clearing operations across the country, it added. "Special clearing will be conducted for government cheques both on 30 and 31 March, 2024. Agency banks are hereby advised that all cheques related to government accounts may be presented on such clearing," the RBI said. Regarding reporting of central and state government transactions to RBI, the reporting window of 31 March will be kept open till 1200 hours on 1 April, 2024. —*PTI*

India looking at Africa for critical minerals

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

India is looking at Africa for minerals, including cobalt, and other critical minerals, Mines Secretary V L Kantha Rao said on Friday. The country is still engaging with Australia for lithium blocks, he said. Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a function here, the Secretary said, "In Africa, we are looking at Zambia, Namibia, Congo, Ghana and Mozambique for critical minerals." Critical minerals, including lithium and cobalt, are crucial for technology, manufacturing and other industries. Rao further said the rules for auction of offshore minerals blocks are being readied and that 10 offshore blocks would be put on sale. —*PTI*

Databricks to double down investment in India

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

US-based data and AI company Databricks on Friday said they are "doubling down" investments in India amid "an increase in demand for data and AI solutions across the country". Over the past two years, we have witnessed an increase in the demand for data and AI solutions from all industries, including FSI, retail, manufacturing, and digital natives, a senior company official said in a statement. "To meet this growing demand, we're doubling down on our investments in India, most recently with our launch of Databricks infrastructure on Google Cloud and the expansion of both our Indian go-to-market and R&D (research and development) teams," the statement said. Databricks opened its R&D hub in Bengaluru last year. —*PTI*

Markets rise for 3rd session; Sensex gains 190 pts

Nifty advances 84.80 points or 0.39 per cent to 22,096.75

MUMBAI, 22 MARCH

Sun Pharma, Maruti, IndusInd Bank are the major gainers PHOTO: PTI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher for the third straight session on Friday, following gains in index majors L&T, ITC and Maruti and a record rally in the US markets after the Federal Reserve indicated three rate cuts this year.

However, a massive sell-off in IT and tech stocks kept indices under pressure and restricted the rise after Accenture lowered its revenue forecast for the sector for fiscal 2023-24, traders said.

After falling in early trade, markets staged a smart recovery. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 190.75 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 72,831.94. However, a sharp correction in IT and tech stocks limited the rise. During the day, it jumped 474.43 points or 0.65 per cent to 73,115.62.

The NSE Nifty advanced 84.80 points or 0.39 per cent to 22,096.75.

On a weekly basis, the BSE benchmark climbed 188.51 points or 0.25 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 73.4 points or 0.33 per cent.

From the Sensex basket, Sun Pharma, Maruti, IndusInd Bank, Titan, ITC, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro and JSW Steel were the major gainers.

On the other hand, Infosys, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra and Bajaj Finserv were among the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.06 per cent, and the midcap index climbed 0.38 per cent.

Accenture on Tuesday lowered its revenue forecast for fiscal year 2024 due to global uncertainty and weak client spending on consulting services. It now sees full-year revenue growth to be between 1-3 per cent, down from the earlier projection of 2-5 per cent. In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower, while Tokyo ended in the positive territory.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,826.97 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. —*PTI*

35 PAISE FALL

The rupee had earlier recorded its lowest closing level of 83.40 on 13 December, 2023 PHOTO: PTI

Rupee falls to all-time low, closes at 83.48 against USD

MUMBAI, 22 MARCH

The rupee depreciated 35 paise to settle at an all-time low of 83.48 against the American currency on Friday, tracking a surging greenback against major crosses in the overseas markets and weak Asian peers.

Forex traders said foreign fund outflows also weighed on the local unit.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened weak at 83.28 against the greenback, and finally settled at a record low of 83.48 (provisional), registering a fall of 35 paise from the previous close of 83.13.

In intraday trade, the rupee touched a low of 83.52 against the American currency.

The rupee had earlier recorded its lowest closing level of 83.40 on 13 December, 2023.

According to Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the US dollar strengthened on weak euro and pound.

Euro declined as the Swiss National Bank (SNB) surprised the markets by cutting interest rates by 25 bps to 1.5 per cent, which raised the odds of a rate cut by the European Central Bank (ECB) in June 2024.

The pound also fell after the Bank of England kept interest rates unchanged at 5.25 per cent. Two hawkish committee members, who voted for a rate hike in the previous meeting, also voted for a no rate hike. Robust economic data from the US also favoured the US dollar, Choudhary said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.31 per cent higher at 104.32 on Friday.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.05 per cent to USD 85.74 per barrel. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on the strong US dollar and expectations of a bounce back in crude oil prices. However, a positive tone in the domestic markets may support the rupee at lower levels. Any selling of dollars by the RBI may also support the rupee," Choudhary added. —*PTI*

'INFLATION DOWN'

India's outlook for next fiscal positive, says finance ministry

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Nirmala S itharaman PHOTO: PTI

The Finance Ministry on Friday said with an uptick in private investment and inflation trending down, India's outlook for the next fiscal looks positive.

The Monthly Economic Review also said that inclusion of Indian bonds in Bloomberg bond index from January 2025 should bolster inflows.

It said robust investment activity is driving growth amid a steady rise in consumption.

"The continued focus on public investment seems to have crowded in private investment," said the February edition of the review by Department of Economic Affairs.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) has revised upwards the GDP growth estimate for current fiscal to 7.6 per cent from 7.3 per cent.

India grew above 8 per cent for three consecutive quarters, reaffirming its position as a standout performer amid sluggish global growth trends. Various agencies echo a similar sentiment revising the FY24 growth estimates of India closer to 8 per cent, the ministry said.

"On the whole, India looks positively towards the dawn of FY25," the review said.

It said increased demand for residential properties in tier-2 and tier-3 cities augurs well for furthering construction activity.

Non-farm employment has revived, improving the capacity to absorb the labour leaving agriculture.

"The ascent of manufacturing sector employment is expected to be marked by upscaling of enterprises and sunrise sectors emerging as catalysts for generating quality employment," it added.

It said strong growth accompanied by stable inflation and external account and progressive employment outlook will help the Indian economy close the current financial year on a positive note.

"There are headwinds like indications of hardening crude oil prices and global supply chain bottlenecks to trade. Nonetheless, India, on the whole, looks forward to a bright outlook for FY25," the monthly review said.

It said India's inflation outlook for the upcoming months is positive.

Core inflation is trending downwards, indicating a broad-based moderation in price pressures. The pick-up in summer sowing is likely to help reduce food prices, it added. —*PTI*

GOVT ALLOCATES ₹6,200 CRORE FOR RURAL BANKS

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The Modi government has provided Rs 6212.03 crore to Regional Rural Banks under the recapitalization scheme as of 6 March.

Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) are commercial banks owned by the Indian government that operate at the regional level in different states. RRBs were established in 1975 to provide basic banking and financial services to rural areas, particularly to small and marginal farmers, agricultural laborers, artisans, and small entrepreneurs.The performance of RRBs has improved significantly, with a consolidated CRAR (Capital to Risk-weighted Assets Ratio) at an all-time high of 13.83 per cent as of 31 December, 2023.

Under the scheme, recapitalization support is provided to RRBs to maintain the minimum prescribed capital-to-risk (Weighted) Assets ratio of nine per cent.

RRBs are vital for banking and financial services to rural communities, agriculture activities and small businesses. —*ANI*

Reddit shares jump 55% in Wall Street debut

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Reddit soared in its Wall Street debut as investors pushed the value of the company close to USD 9 billion seconds after it began trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Reddit, which priced its IPO at USD 34 a share, debuted Thursday afternoon at USD 47 a share. The going price has climbed even higher since, with shares for the self-anointed "front page of the internet" soaring more than 55 per cent as of around 1.20 pm ET.

The IPO will test the quirky company's ability to overcome a nearly 20-year history coloured by uninterrupted losses, management turmoil and occasional user backlashes to build a sustainable business.

The interest surrounding Reddit stems largely from a large audience that religiously visits the service to discuss a potpourri of subjects that range from silly memes to existential worries, as well as get recommendations from like-minded people.

About 76 million users checked into one of Reddit's roughly 100,000 communities in December. —*PTI*

Govt rejects Hindustan Zinc's plan to split firm

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

HINDUSTAN ZINC

PHOTO: X

The Mines Ministry has rejected a proposal by Vedanta group's firm Hindustan Zinc Ltd to split the company into different entities, a top official on Friday said. The government is the largest minority shareholder in Hindustan Zinc, owning a 29.54 per cent stake in the company. "We have not agreed to the proposal," Mines Secretary V L Kantha Rao told reporters on the sidelines of a function.

Hindustan Zinc had earlier announced its plans of spinning off business into separate entities, including zinc and silver, to increase its market capitalisation. When asked about the reason for the rejection of the proposal, the Secretary said "Whatever report we have in front of us we are not convinced as a shareholder."

According to a regulatory filing, the move is aimed at creating separate legal entities for zinc, lead, silver, and recycling businesses. The move aims at forming appropriate capital structure and capital allocation policies based on business-specific dynamics and sharpen focus on core competencies and appropriate realignment of the company's resources. —*PTI*

SEEKS INTERVENTION

SEA voices concerns as mustard seeds prices fall

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Expressing concern over rape-mustard seed rates falling below the minimum support price (MSP), edible oil industry body SEA on Tuesday demanded the government commence procurement and restrict imports of refined palm oil as part of steps to arrest the price drop.

Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA), in a representation to both food and commerce secretaries, said mustard seed prices in the wholesale market yards have crashed below the MSP of Rs 5,450 per quintal and the arrivals are increasing on a daily basis.

"Further drop in prices cannot be ruled out," SEA Executive Director B V Mehta said.

He also noted that unbridled imports of refined palm oil have led to the collapse in domestic edible oil prices which is impacting the marketing of mustard seed at peak harvest time and causing distress to farmers.

To arrest further fall in prices, SEA has suggested the government restrict the import of refined palm oil by putting the commodity under the restricted category or by raising the import duty differential between crude palm oil (CPO) and Palmolein to a minimum of 20 per cent. —*PTI*

India's forex kitty rises by 6.40 B to USD 642.50 B

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

India's forex reserves increased by USD 6.396 billion to USD 642.492 billion for the week ended March 15, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had risen by USD 10.47 billion to USD 636.095 billion.

In October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion.

The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year.

For the week ended 15 March, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by USD 6.034 billion to USD 568.386 billion, the data showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 425 million to USD 51.14 billion during the week, the RBI said.The Special Drawing Rights were up by USD 65 million to USD 18.276 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 129 million to USD 4.689 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. —*PTI*

ELECTION FERVOUR

Political parties' merchandise sizzles online ahead of LS polls

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Political fervour has permeated even the realm of e-commerce in India, with merchandise related to various political parties becoming hot commodities. From BJP's lotus on dream catchers to AAP's logo on vintage maritime clocks and Congress' signature dupattas, these online platforms offer a plethora of election-themed products.

Simply enter the name of the desired political party into the search bar of an e-commerce website, and a diverse array of merchandise ranging from flags to pendants to pens will populate the page.

This trend initially emerged during the 2019 polls when e-commerce platforms became go-to destinations for campaign merchandise and accessories, a representative from an e-commerce platform said.

"When everything is sold online, why not this and it is the sellers who put it on our platforms and the e-commerce websites have to just check it follows the protocol," the e-commerce platform's representative said.

Notably, some political parties themselves have actively participated in selling such merchandise on their respective websites.

The NaMo merchandise website boasts an extensive range of products including T-shirts, mugs and notebooks PHOTO:PTI

The NaMo merchandise website, for instance, boasts an extensive range of products including T-shirts, mugs, notebooks, badges, wristbands, keychains, stickers, magnets, caps, and pens adorned with slogans such as 'Modi ka parivar,' 'Phir ek baar, Modi sarkar,' 'Modi ki guarantee', and 'Modi hai toh mumkin hai'.

Despite PTI's attempts to seek a response from Amazon India and Flipkart on this trend, responses from both platforms were not received.

However, one of the suppliers of these merchandise to e-commerce platforms revealed that Lok Sabha elections witnessed a surge in online sales of such items.

Furthermore, the supplier noted that merchandise associated with BJP and Congress remains among the highest-selling items, although the full impact of election fervour is yet to be realised, as this reflects only the preliminary trend.Another supplier highlighted a new trend emerging this time around: a heightened demand for merchandise representing regional and state parties.

Many sellers are now focusing on product innovation. Examples include a clock featuring the Samajwadi Party's logo, a wind catcher adorned with the BJP's lotus emblem, and dupattas featuring the Congress logo.

Lok Sabha polls are scheduled to be held in seven phases, commencing on 19 April, with vote counting slated for 4 June. —*PTI*

Comeback-man Pant, as DC take on Punjab Kings

Shreyas' comeback in the spotlight in Starc vs Cummins showdown

CHANDIGARH, 22 MARCH

Rishabh Pant's resilient return to the cricket field in multiple roles will be the focus when Delhi Capitals take on Punjab Kings in their IPL opener here on Saturday, both teams hoping to erase the disappointment of below-par performances in the last season.

Pant's miraculous escape from a life-threatening car crash in December 2022 has now become a tale of perseverance after the big-hitting wicketkeeper-batter made a faster-than-expected recovery to be back in action.

He has been cleared to play as a keeper-batter and has the additional responsibility of captaining the side, taking back the position from David Warner, who led DC to a ninth-place finish in the 10-team tournament last year."

It has taken 15 months of hard work, courage, and determination for Pant to be ready to lead DC again. He is a massive shot in the arm for the team whose best-ever performance in the IPL to date is a runners-up finish in 2020.

Rishabh Pant and Shreyas Iyer PHOTO: PTI

Shreyas Iyer's comeback from a long injury layoff will be in focus as IPL's two biggest signings, Australian pacers Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins, go head to head in Kolkata Knight Riders' opening match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Saturday.

The Indian batter, after missing the entire season last year due to a back injury, returns to lead KKR, who have made some tactical additions while keeping the nucleus of the side intact. Shreyas sparkled with the bat with a 95 in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy triumph recently but it remains to be seen whether he'll be available for all the matches, given his fitness concerns. KKR's most successful leader Gautam Gambhir is back in his second innings as a mentor.

—PTI

TODAY'S MATCH

DELHI CAPITALS vs PUNJAB KINGS

Time: 3:30 PM

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: The Inderjit Singh Bindra Stadium, Mohali

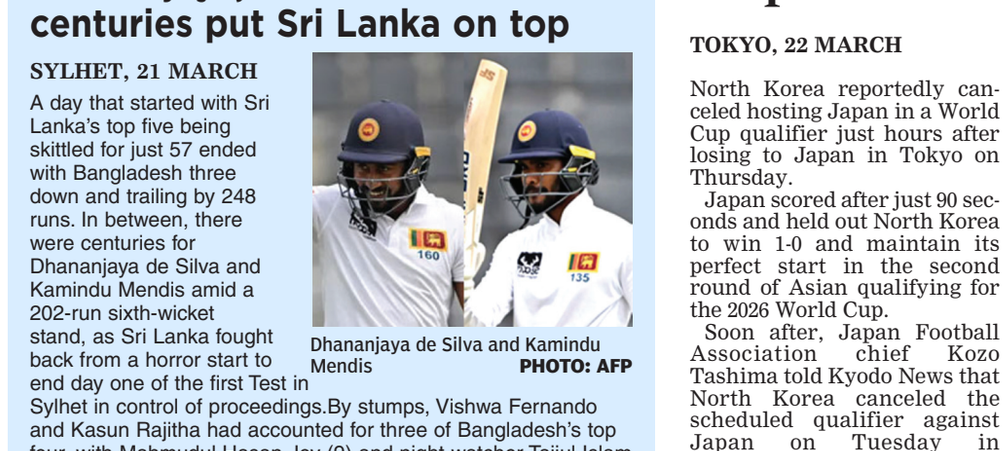
TODAY'S MATCH

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS vs SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Eden Gardens stadium, Kolkata



Rachin Ravindra plays a shot during the IPL tie against RCB in Chennai PHOTO: PTI

Chennai beat RCB by 6 wickets

CHENNAI, 22 MARCH

An excellent spell by Mustafizur Rahman (4 for 29) and unbeaten knocks by Shivam Dube (34 runs from 28 balls) and Ravindra Jadeja (25 runs off 17 balls) helped Chennai Super Kings (CSK) beat Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) by six wickets in the IPL 2024 tournament opener at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday.

Chasing 174 runs for victory, CSK got off to a rollicking start with the new opening pair of captain Ruturak Gaikwad and Rachin Ravindra taking the RCB bowling attack to the cleaners, putting on (runs) in for overs.

RCB's new acquisition Yash Dayal gave his side the much-needed breakthrough, removing the former (15 runs off 15 balls), but Ravindra-making his CSK continued to drive the innings forward in the company of Ajinkya Rahane to take CSK to 62 for 1 after six overs.

Mustafizur Rahman brought back memories of his rookie days with his cerebral variations. Still, an impressive rearguard action from Anuj Rawat took Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a respectable 173 for six in the IPL opener here on Friday. *—PTI*

Sathiyan wins first-ever WTT title

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Star paddler G. Sathiyan has become the first-ever Indian to win a men's singles trophy at a WTT Feeder Series event in Beirut, Lebanon.

He defeated compatriot Manav Thakkar 3-1 (6-11 11-7 11-7 11-4) on the final day of WTT Feeder Beirut 2024 on Thursday night.

Seeded No.11, Sathiyan enjoyed a rewarding path to the final in the Lebanese capital, taking down No.5 seed Harmeet Desai (15-13 6-11 11-8 13-11) and top seed Chuang Chih-Yuan (11-8 11-13 11-8 11-9) along the way.

But the match Sathiyan will remember most is the final as he overcame an early setback to see off No.9 seed Thakkar in four games.

The result marks Sathiyan's first men's singles success at a WTT event and his first singles title at an international ranking event since the ITTF Czech International Open 2021.

Meanwhile, Xia Lian Ni picked up her second WTT Feeder title in women's singles, producing an excellent display to break down Suh Hyo Won's defensive barrier 11-9 11-5 11-5.

A wildcard entrant for the event, Ni dropped just one game on her way to the semifinal, and was even more clinical at the penultimate hurdle, needing just three games to dispatch No.2 seed Chen Szu-Yu (11-7 11-9 11-4).

Appearing in her first international women's singles final since 2018, Suh did everything in her power to try and lay her hands on a first WTT singles trophy.

Diya Chitale and Manush Shah defeated Manav and Archana Kamath 3-1 (11-6, 10-12, 11-6, 11-6) to be crowned champions in the mixed doubles.

Despite coming up against higher-ranked compatriots in the final, Shah and Chitale looked convincing and dominated proceedings.

The doubles moment of the week undoubtedly belongs to Andy Pereira and Jorge Campos, who are the first pair from Cuba to strike WTT title success after beating the Indian duo Manav and Manush Utpalbhai Shah to the men's doubles crown with a 3-1 win (5-11, 11-7, 13-11, 14-12). *—PTI*

Sathiyan clinches historic WTT Feeder title, Diya-Manush mixed doubles championsa PHOTO: PTI

Dhananjaya, Kamindu's centuries put Sri Lanka on top

SYLHET, 21 MARCH

A day that started with Sri Lanka's top five being skittled for just 57 ended with Bangladesh three down and trailing by 248 runs. In between, there were centuries for Dhananjaya de Silva and Kamindu Mendis amid a 202-run sixth-wicket stand, as Sri Lanka fought back from a horror start to end day one of the first Test in Sylhet in control of proceedings.By stumps, Vishwa Fernando and Kasun Rajitha had accounted for three of Bangladesh's top four, with Mahmudul Hasan Joy (9) and night watcher Taijul Islam (0) at the crease. It was a day that belonged to the fast bowlers, except for two notable exceptions, as Dhananjaya and Kamindu showcased just how easy batting could get once you got yourself in and the ball softened up. Having come together with the score of 57 for 5, the pair rode out the early movement being exploited by the seamers to see Sri Lanka through to lunchBangladesh 32 for 3 (Vishwa 2-9, Rajitha 1-20) trail Lanka 280 (Kamindu 102, Dhananjaya 102, Khaled 3-72, Rana 3-87) by 248 runs. *—AP*

Dhananjaya de Silva and Kamindu Mendis PHOTO: AFP

Japan beats Korea in WC qualifying

TOKYO, 22 MARCH

North Korea reportedly canceled hosting Japan in a World Cup qualifier just hours after losing to Japan in Tokyo on Thursday.

Japan scored after just 90 seconds and held out North Korea to win 1-0 and maintain its perfect start in the second round of Asian qualifying for the 2026 World Cup.

Soon after, Japan Football Association chief Kozo Tashima told Kyodo News that North Korea canceled the scheduled qualifier against Japan on Tuesday in Pyongyang, giving the news in a letter to the Asian Football Confederation.

North Korea was concerned by "a malignant infectious disease" in Japan, an apparent reference to rising cases of streptococcus infections, Kyodo said.

Ao Tanaka's strike at the National Stadium gave host Japan three wins from three Group B games.

The midfielder fired home from inside a crowded penalty area after a Ritsu Doan pullback.

North Korea, cheered on by a small pocket of red-shirted fans, lacked the attacking power to get back in the game. North Korea has only three points from the first three group games. *—PTI*

Japan registered a victory over North Korea by 1-0 PHOTO: AFP

SINDHU, SEN BOW OUT; SRIKANTH AND RAJAWAT IN Q/FS

BASEL, 22 MARCH

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu's run at the Swiss Open was cut short by a Japanese teenager, while top Indian male shuttler Lakshya Sen lost to Lee Chia-Hao of Chinese-Taipei in the pre-quarterfinals of the Super 300 tournament here.

Ace Indian shuttlers Kidambi Srikanth, Priyansh Rajawat, and Kiran George won their respective men's singles round of 16 matches to advance to the quarterfinals late on Thursday night.

Sindhu, after bowing out in the second round of the recently-concluded All England Championships, lost to Japan's 17-year-old junior world champion Tomoka Miyazaki 21-16 19-21 16-21. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kotian replaces Zampa at Royals; Sharath joins Titans

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Mumbai's crisis man Tanush Kotian, who played a key role in their record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy triumph this season, was on Friday drafted in by Rajasthan Royals as a replacement for Aussie Zampa. Kotian joined at his base price of Rs 20 lakh, the IPL announced. Zampa, who picked up eight wickets from six matches for the Royals last season, was retained at his Rs 1.5-crore contract but the Australian leg-spinner pulled out citing heavy workload in the build-up to the T20I World Cup in June.Kotian, an off-spinner and a handy lower-order batter, was expecting an IPL contract in 2023 after playing a vital role in Mumbai's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy triumph but was reported for a suspect bowling action.But the 25-year-old showed resilience to fight back and become the player of the tournament (502 runs and 29 wickets) in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy triumph this season.Kotian, who usually bats at No. 8, scored an unbeaten 120 in the second innings and followed it up with an 89 not out in the quarterfinal and semifinal games against Baroda and Tamil Nadu respectively. *—PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Robinho starts 9-year prison sentence

SAO PAULO, 22 MARCH

Former soccer star Robinho started serving a nine-year prison sentence in his native Brazil on Thursday more than 10 years after he was first accused of raping a woman in Italy. The 40-year-old Robinho left his apartment building in the beachfront city of Santos, outside Sao Paulo, in a black police car after losing a bid to remain free pending appeals. A Brazilian high court ruled Wednesday that Robinho must serve his sentence in his home nation as a result of his 2017 rape conviction in Italy. Judges on Brazil's Superior Court of Justice in the capital city of Brasilia voted 9-2 to validate the conviction of the former Real Madrid, Manchester City and AC Milan striker. *—AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Sainz returns to F1 racing in Australia

MELBOURNE, 22 MARCH

Turns out Ferrari's Carlos Sainz didn't need to "raise his hand" and have another driver take his place during the first two practice sessions for Sunday's Australian Formula 1 Grand Prix. Sainz was eighth-fastest in the first session and improved to third-quickest in the second on the Albert Park circuit on Friday. Earlier in the week Sainz said he felt he was ready to return to the cockpit but wasn't feeling 100% after surgery for appendicitis that ruled him out of the 10 March race in Saudi Arabia. "It's been a couple of tough weeks leading to today and to be honest I'm very happy.*—AP*

OLYMPIC DREAM

It still hurts, haven't been able to get over it: Punia

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The crying didn't help, and living in denial didn't help, what helped was picking up the hockey stick again to make a fresh start.

The 'Great Wall' of Indian women's hockey and captain Savita Punia has been an emotional wreck ever since the team failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, a massive downfall after the superb fourth-place finish in Tokyo just three years ago.

"Good moments in life are not forgotten but neither are the bad ones. Losing the Olympic qualifiers is such a bad moment that we will probably not be able to forget our entire life," the 33-year-old goalkeeper told 'PTI Bhasha' in an interview.

"I haven't been able to get over it yet," she admitted rather candidly, the disappointment audible through her soft voice.

The heartbreak is now almost two months old. Punia was among those who were seen sobbing when the final hooter went off in the third-place match against Japan, India down by a solitary goal ending their Paris hopes.

"I didn't want to talk about it because it still hurts a lot. I still can't believe that we are not going to the Olympics. We were confident and well-prepared but you cannot predict anything in sports. "After the qualifiers, we were at home for a week and told all the players that this break is a for them to cry and feel sad as much as they want. Keeping it inside will do no good and it is necessary to vent it out. No one talked about the Olympic qualifiers during this break," she revealed. The first step in the recovery process was to get back to the game. So, she competed in the FIH Pro League just 10 days after the qualifiers, and then came the ongoing Nationals in Pune. She turned up for her state Haryana after a good six years, continuing the healing process. "The good thing about sports is that you have to forget the past and move forward very quickly. That's why I came to Pune to play the Senior Nationals because hockey is my passion and the more I stay away from the field, the more it will bother me," she said.

"When the team gathered in Bhubaneswar for the Pro League, in the first team meeting we asked how everyone was feeling. *—PTI*

Indian women's hockey and captain Savita Punia PHOTO: PTI

- The 'Great Wall' of Indian women's hockey and captain Savita Punia has been an emotional wreck ever since the team failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, a massive downfall after the superb fourth-place finish in Tokyo just three years ago.